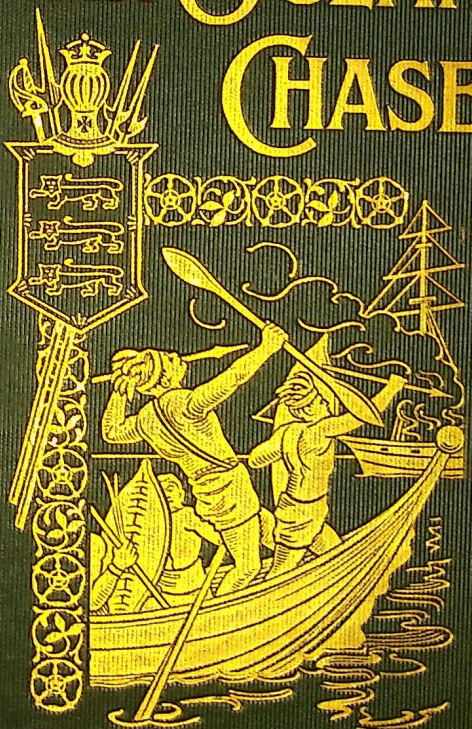
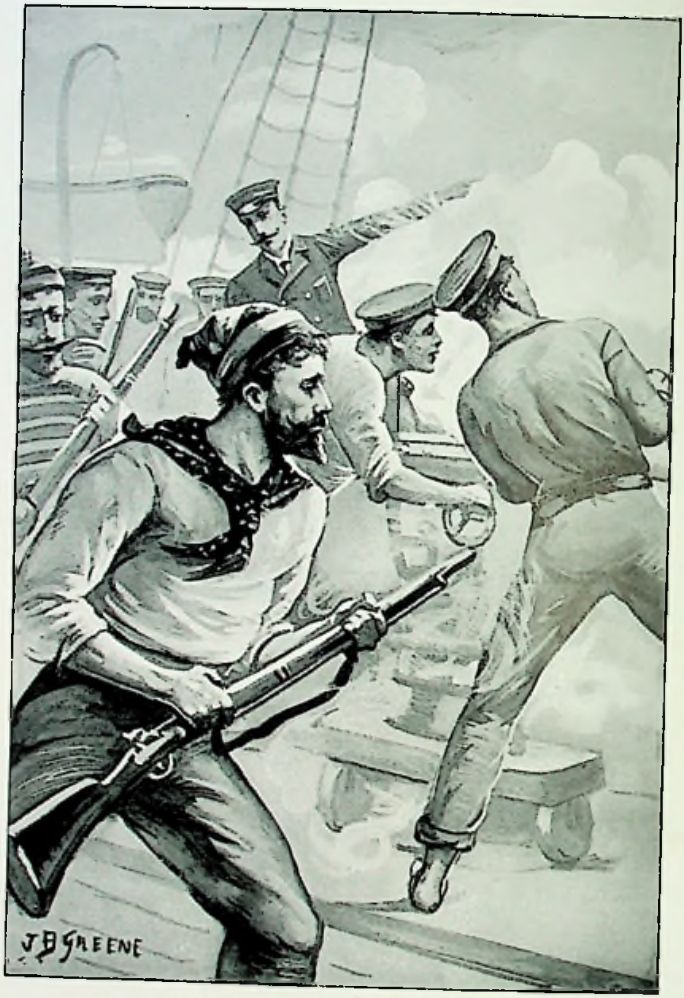
AN OCEAN CHASE



HARRY COLLINGWOOD

AN OCEAN CHASE



"AIM LOW, AND SWEEP HIS DECKS."

Frontispiece.

See page 186.

AN OCEAN CHASE

BY

HARRY COLLINGWOOD

AUTHOR OF "THE SECRET OF THE SANDS" "THE PIRATE ISLAND"
"THE LOG OF THE FLYING FISH" "MISSING"
"THE DOCTOR OF THE JULIET"
ETC. ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY J. E. GREENE

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AN OCEAN CHASE

CHAPTER I

MISSING!

"TELEGRAM for you, sir; and a shillin' to pay the boatman for bringin' it off," remarked the steward, as he handed me the document.

At the moment that I took the buff-coloured envelope into my hand and prepared to tear it open, there was probably no happier fellow in the whole wide world than I—Dick Berrington.

And for the best of reasons. In the first place, I was the possessor of one of the very finest estates in the fair county of Devon, with an ample fortune for its and my own maintenance; in the next place, I was in the very prime of my youth; and, finally, I was to be married, within a fortnight, to sweet Eva Hepburn—an Australian beauty and heiress—after encountering and triumphantly overcoming a quite unusual and extraordinary amount of opposition on the part of the fair lady's uncle and guardian, Colonel Hepburn.

Providence had been very good to me—infinitely more beneficent, indeed, than I had at one time the slightest reason to expect. Barely a year ago—at which time I was the merest nonentity in the eyes of that portion of the world called "society"—only a simple lieutenant in the British navy, with nothing but my pay to live upon—I had first set eyes upon Miss Hepburn, and had been informed, by those who were supposed to know, that she was an orphan, of Australian parentage, who had been commended to the care of her uncle in England—Colonel Hepburn—with her father's dying breath. Of course I fell in love with the sweet girl immediately that my eyes rested upon her; but this, in my then position, was simply a piece of fatuous folly; for what could a poor devil of a naval lieutenant, dependent only upon his pay,—and in peace-time, too, with no prospect of a coming war,—do with a wife who, although lovely as a goddess, would have to be her own cook and housemaid, and nurse her babies herself? So, having irretrievably lost my heart to the fair Australian orphan girl, I no sooner found—or fancied that I found—some faint shadow of justification for a suspicion that she was disposed to regard me a shade more favourably than any of her other numerous admirers, than honour relentlessly whispered in my ear that it was time for me to haul off and leave the field open to more eligible suitors; and I did so, sorely against my will, it must be confessed.

Two months later found me back on board my ship in

the Mediterranean, fruitlessly endeavouring to find distraction in a dreary round of festivities at Malta, when news reached me that my grumpy old second cousin had died, leaving me his magnificent estate and princely fortune, instead of bequeathing it to sundry missions and charities, as he had threatened he would; and I at once cut the service and hurried back to England, exultant with the consciousness that one bar at least to my union with my enslaver—that of poverty—had been removed.

It was at this time, when I fondly hoped that the only serious obstacle to the success of my suit had disappeared, that I encountered the unexpected and singularly strenuous opposition of Eva's guardian, already referred to; but that once overcome, everything had gone smoothly, up to the moment of the arrival of the telegram, which was handed to me as I sat in the cabin of my beautiful new schooner yacht, the *Evangeline*, built for the express purpose of conveying my bride and myself on a wedding-trip round the world. The vessel had been delivered over to me by her builders that same morning, and as I took the buff-coloured envelope from the steward, the crew — picked men and R.N.R.'s every one of them— were busily engaged in rolling up the canvas after a thoroughly satisfactory trial of her sailing powers round the Wight.

It was on the evening of the 26th of August that I received the telegram which forms the opening incident of my story, and, as I have already mentioned, the date

was within a fortnight of that fixed upon for my marriage with Eva Hepburn. The growing imminence of this important event in my life was productive of a steadily increasing number of demands upon my attention: matters of the most diverse description were constantly being referred to me for decision; inquiries from the tradesmen and others who had charge of the preparations in connection with the event were pouring in upon me in a daily increasing flood; and my sweetheart's expenditure in telegrams, asking my opinion upon this, that, and the other matter, or acquainting me with the character of the presents that were daily coming to hand, must, I am sure, have sensibly swelled the Post Office revenue for that quarter. I was consequently becoming tolerably familiar with the aspect of the telegram envelope, and had long ceased to regard it with trepidation as the outward and visible sign of a more or less important communication, usually of a distinctly disagreeable character. When, therefore, the particular missive in question was put into my hand, I opened it with the utmost composure, quite prepared to find some such message as: "Dear Lady Dashwood has just sent the most lovely diamond bracelet. Is it not good of her?" or, "Do you think I shall really need as many as thirty ball-dresses? I am afraid I shall not be able to find room for more than twenty-four." What I actually read was—

"For God's sake, come up at once. Eva missing.—H. H."

"*Eva missing!*" Yes, those were the words, beyond any possibility of doubt or question, for they were written with even more than the ordinary distinctness characteristic of the caligraphy of the Post Office telegraph clerk. "What on earth did it mean?" I asked myself, as I sat staring at the accursed pink paper in a dazed, stupid, stunned sort of way, my mind resolutely refusing to accept the plain, literal statement. MISSING! how *could* she be missing? Missing people *disappeared*, leaving no trace behind them, and either were never heard of again, or, if heard of, were found to have had some especially good reason for vanishing. Why, who were the people that usually disappeared? Dishonest bank managers and cashiers, fraudulent trustees — *criminals* of one sort or another, almost invariably. But whoever heard of a young lady absconding within a fortnight of her wedding-day—unless, indeed, it was a case of elopement with a more fav— Pshaw! what was I thinking about? Such an explanation could not possibly apply to Eva's disappearance; she was the very personification of guilelessness and truth, and besides, who was there—?

"Steward!"

"Yes, sir."

"Ask Captain Purkiss to step below. Mitchell, I must run up to town at once—to-night, if I can catch a train; and you had better go with me. Just find me a Bradshaw at once, and then get a few things ready for the journey."

Mitchell was my valet; a most useful fellow, who had come to me with the very best of testimonials. He was intelligent, too; understood what was wanted without requiring one to enter upon lengthy explanations, and never gave trouble by raising objections to any order he might receive, however difficult or troublesome of execution it might seem. He produced the Bradshaw, and vanished into my cabin to make the necessary preparations, just as the bluff form of Purkiss darkened the entrance to the saloon.

"Want me, sir?" demanded the burly old salt, with a finger to his forehead, finding me deeply immersed in the pages of the railway time-tables, and thinking I had not remarked his presence.

"Yes. Sit down a moment, Purkiss—ah, here we are! Boat leaves Cowes at eight. Train leaves Southampton Docks at nine thirty-five; due Waterloo at midnight. What is the time now? Phew! five minutes past eight! There is no chance of getting that boat, I am afraid"—

"No, sir," cut in Purkiss; "I noticed her comin' out just as I was comin' below — that sounds like the noise of her floats now. Yes," he continued, peering through one of the saloon ports, "there she goes, like a house afire. Was you wantin' to run up to town to-night, sir?"

"Yes," said I; "and what is more, I want to get there as early as possible"—

"Then you'd better have the launch, sir," cut in Purkiss again. "We can get steam aboard of her in

twenty minutes; and she'll run you across in an hour, easy. Shall I have her got ready, sir?"

"By all means," answered I. "See to the matter yourself, Purkiss, if you please, and let me know when she is ready."

"Certainly, sir," answered the skipper. And, with another sea flourish of his hand to his forehead, he turned and left the cabin. A minute later the shrill, chirruping call of the boatswain's pipe reached me through the open skylight, followed by a hoarse cry of "Launches away!" and then came a sound of scuffling feet on deck, the thump of the tackle-falls as they were flung down on the planks overhead, the shrill *cheeping* of the patent block sheaves, a momentary shadowing of three or four of the scuttles on the port side of the saloon, as the hull of the launch descended past them, and the plash of her as she took the water.

I turned out my pockets and hastily scrutinised the cash I had in them, satisfied myself that there was sufficient to carry me and my man to our journey's end, lighted a cigar, and went on deck, with my mind busily working upon the problem which Colonel Hepburn's telegram had set me. My mental faculties had by this time recovered to a great extent from the shock which the terse message had inflicted upon them, and I found myself able to consider the matter coherently, if not quite calmly. I began to realise that something untoward had happened; but I could not, and *would* not,

believe that it was anything serious. Something had occurred to prevent Eva from returning home as early as she had expected, and she had either forgotten to send an explanatory message to her guardian, or the message had somehow gone astray. It would be nearly one o'clock in the morning by the time that I should reach the house in Park Lane, and when I did so I should doubtless find that the dear girl had turned up there safe and sound, and that the delay in her reappearance had proved of the simplest and most commonplace character. There *could* not be, and was not, the slightest reason for her *voluntary* disappearance; and as to its being involuntary—pshaw! the days of kidnapping were past, for the simple reason that this particular form of crime was no longer possible. This argument seemed to me to be so absolutely conclusive and unanswerable, that I derived the greatest comfort and encouragement from it; and when at length, the launch being ready, I stepped down into her and seated myself in the stern-sheets, it was with the conviction that the journey upon which I was starting would result in the discovery that Colonel Hepburn had found a mare's nest.

The launch was a splendid boat, built entirely of steel, immensely strong, and very light, with air chambers fore and aft and along each side, rendering her unsinkable; she was double-ended, and was fitted with twin screws which, with her compact but very powerful engines, and her beautiful lines, sent her along at a tremendous pace

through the water. She reached the pier with fully ten minutes to spare, and I handsomely saved my train.

There were not many people travelling that night, and Mitchell consequently had no difficulty in securing a separate compartment for me, while I despatched a telegram to Colonel Hepburn informing him when to expect me. This done, I composed myself in my corner, and, lighting a cigar, while the train swept through the darkening landscape, carefully went over every theory I could possibly imagine to account for my sweetheart's alleged disappearance, but utterly failed to find one that would fit the circumstances suggested by the telegram. The urgent wording of the message indicated clearly enough that Colonel Hepburn regarded his niece's prolonged absence from home in a most ominous light, as a matter of quite tragical import, indeed; but, devotedly attached though I was to Eva,—fertile of apprehension as the lover's brain usually is in all matters connected with the welfare of his heart's mistress,—I had no feeling of uneasiness, strange to say; for I found it utterly impossible to believe that my darling had really vanished from our midst. Such a tragical disappearance as the colonel's apprehensions appeared to point to *must* have a motive—I argued with myself—either a motive on Eva's part strong enough to constrain her voluntary withdrawal from the ken of her nearest and dearest, or a motive on the part of someone else, imperatively demanding her removal. The most diligent conjecture on my part

entirely failed to furnish me with any suggestion of a reason for the possible existence of a motive of either kind, and I found myself constantly driven back to the conviction that on my arrival at Park Lane I should find her there.

The train was a little late in arriving at Waterloo; but I was fortunate enough to find a cab with a decent horse in the shafts, and a hint to the cabby sufficed to send him careering along the still crowded, gas-lighted streets at a pace that would certainly have cost him an appearance before the magistrate a few hours later, could a policeman have laid hands upon him. We reached our destination, however, without damage, either to ourselves or anybody else, and, dismissing the cab, I sprang up the steps just as the door was opened by one of the servants to admit me.

"Colonel Hepburn is in the library, sir," said the man, who knew me well. "He gave orders that you were to be taken there directly you arrived."

I did not care to put any questions to the fellow, and his well-trained, expressionless face and manner told me absolutely nothing as he admitted me; but the ghastly pallor of Colonel Hepburn's face, and the palsied agitation he exhibited as he rose from his capacious arm-chair and stretched forth his right hand in greeting, made me reel as from a stunning physical blow; for I saw in an instant that the plausible arguments with which I had been encouraging myself during the journey were fallacious, and that my darling was indeed *lost*!

"Thank God you are here at last, Dick!" ejaculated the colonel, as he grasped my hand and peered anxiously at me. "But I have not a scrap of comfort to give you, my dear boy—not a scrap! Everything has been done that I could think of, and we have not been able to gain the shadow of a clue as to what has become of her."

"Tell me all about it!" I gasped, as I sank into a chair and, seizing a spirit decanter, poured myself nearly half a tumblerful of brandy; for, indeed, the unexpected news I had just heard made me feel sick and faint, and set the walls of the room, the bookcases, pictures, chandelier—every object by which I was surrounded—spinning and whirling round me in a most alarming fashion, and I involuntarily grasped the arms of my chair to prevent myself from falling.

"You are weak—you are faint, Dick, after your journey!" exclaimed the colonel, in a weak, quivering voice, strangely different from his usual firm, commanding tones, as he stretched his hand toward the bell. "Let me ring for them to bring you some supper."

"Not for worlds!" I protested. "I could not eat now if my life depended upon it. This is all I need to put me right."

And raising the tumbler to my lips, I drained the fiery draught at a single gulp.

"Now I feel better," I continued. "Please tell me everything that has happened."

"There is really very little to tell," answered the

colonel. "We breakfasted together this morning as usual, —Eva and I,—and then, having a few trifling matters to attend to, and a man or two to see at my Club, I went out, understanding from Eva that she was going to devote her morning to a shopping expedition. This was about eleven o'clock. We happened to have stalls for the morning performance of the new piece at the Lyceum to-day, and just as I was about to leave the house, Eva reminded me of the fact, and enjoined me to come home to luncheon without fail, declaring that she would not miss the performance on any account. I promised faithfully that I would not forget, and, kissing the dear girl as usual, walked down to my Club, where I remained until one o'clock. I then took a cab at the Club door, and drove home.

"When I entered the dining-room, a few minutes late, to sit down to luncheon, I was surprised to find that Eva was not there; and upon inquiring of Edwards, I found that he had not seen her since breakfast. I at once sent a message to her maid desiring her to inform Miss Hepburn that luncheon was waiting, and after some little delay Edwards brought me word that Miss Hepburn had not yet returned home. I thought this somewhat strange, remembering how anxious she had appeared to be not to miss the theatre; but after waiting fully half an hour for her in vain, I concluded that somebody had insisted upon carrying her off to lunch, and sat down alone, quite expecting her to make her appearance at any

moment. She had not returned, however, when I at length rose from the table; and when another hour had elapsed without any sign of her, I began to feel decidedly uneasy.

"By this time it had become too late for the theatre,—at which, as you know, Eva has always made a point of arriving in time to see the curtain go up,—so I sent for a cab, and drove round to everybody I could think of, inquiring whether anybody had seen anything of her. I found that several people had met her during the morning, the last person, apparently, being Lady Mary Brooks, who encountered Eva at Peter Robinson's shop door, Eva being in the act of leaving the shop as Lady Mary entered. This, according to Lady Mary, and also to the people in the shop who attended to Eva, must have been about half-past twelve. And that is the last I have been able to hear of her. If she had taken the carriage, it would have been easy enough to have traced her every movement, but you know her passion for walking; and to think of tracing a comparatively unknown person on foot through the streets of London is like searching for a needle in a pottle of hay."

"And is that all?" I asked, in a dry, hard voice that had not the slightest resemblance to my own.

"No, not quite," answered the colonel. "By the time that all these inquiries had been made it was five o'clock, and I drove home again, feeling certain that I should find the child there. She was not, however, nor had she been

to the house; and now, thoroughly convinced that something very dreadful had happened, I jumped into another cab and drove down to Great Scotland Yard, saw the people there, told them everything, and put the affair into their hands, bidding them take whatever steps they pleased to discover the whereabouts of my niece, and to spare no expense whatever. Then I returned home, and, finding Eva still absent, telegraphed for you. And there the matter stands."

"What did the detectives say about the affair?" I asked. "Have they propounded any theory to account for this extraordinary disappearance?"

"No," answered the colonel; "they said very little. Keen—the man who is to work the case—came home with me in the same cab, and on reaching the house he at once sent for Ferris, Eva's maid, and cross-questioned the girl for fully half an hour. Then he went up into Eva's room, and, with Ferris and me, hunted all over the place to see if there were any traces of an unsuspected correspondence. I was savage enough with the fellow to have kicked him out of the window when he explained what it was he was in search of; but the man kept perfectly cool, and told me—without any circumlocution or loss of time—that unless I were willing to give him an absolutely free hand and allow him to conduct the investigation in his own way, he must decline to move in the matter at all. Of course, after that, there was no more to be said."

"Do you know whether any actual steps have been taken as yet toward instituting a search for—for"— I asked.

"I believe so," answered the colonel. "The fellow Keen took a description of Eva, first from me, and then from every other member of the household, separately, from which I understood him to say he intended to compile a description to telegraph to all the ports communicating with the Continent, as well as to Liverpool, Bristol, Glasgow, Southampton—oh, and a lot of other places. He also took one of her latest photographs, which is to be reproduced, and copies of it sent to the various ports already named. This, of course, is to admit of her identification should she attempt to leave the country."

"To leave the country?" I cried. "Good heavens, colonel, what do you mean? What possible motive could your niece have for desiring to leave the country surreptitiously? Have you the faintest suspicion in the world that there might be such a motive?"

"No, no, no, my dear boy; certainly not, certainly not," stammered the colonel, with a very hurried, agitated manner, that somehow I did not like, his words hardly appearing to ring true; yet when I pressed the question again, he still persistently answered that of course there could be no such motive; it was the sheerest insanity to think for a moment of any such possibility; was she not to have been married to me within the fortnight, and was not that the very strongest motive that could be imagined

for restraining her from any such escapade? Did I doubt the sincerity of her love for me, or what did I mean by pressing the question as I had?

"Look here, Colonel Hepburn," said I, rising to my feet, "will you swear, upon your honour as an officer and a gentleman, that you have not the remotest trace of a suspicion that your niece *may* have some motive for withdrawing herself from her home, or—from—from *me*?"

I had no sooner spoken the words than I fully expected the peppery soldier to dash his fist in my face and knock me down, or order me out of the house, with the declaration that he withdrew his consent to my marriage with his niece. Instead of which, he extended his hand to me and solemnly swore the oath I had demanded of him, adding—

"And now, Dick, let us close the discussion for to-night, and turn in, as you sailors say. We are, both of us, worried and puzzled into a state of almost uncontrollable nervous irritability over this dreadful business, that renders us quite unfit to say another word about it to-night. Let us get to bed, and to sleep, if we can; there is sure to be plenty of work for us to do to-morrow—work for which we shall need to have all our wits about us. We *must* have some rest, my dear boy, or we shall be fit for nothing. I have had a room prepared for you, and if you will follow me I will take you to it."

CHAPTER II

A CLUE TO THE MYSTERY

AND now ensued a period of harassing anxiety, and of alternate hope and bitter disappointment, that was distressing beyond all power of words to describe—although I observed with mingled wonder and admiration that, as time went on, and still no clue could be found to the whereabouts of our lost one, the colonel seemed to rally and even to recover a good deal of his former cheerfulness in the most wonderful manner. Of course we freely employed every possible means we could think of to discover what had become of my vanished sweetheart, securing the services of Scotland Yard's best talent, and visiting all the hospitals, upon the chance of her having met with a bad accident; but day after day sped, and still we appeared to make no progress whatever toward a solution of the mystery. At length, however, information reached us that a lady answering to Eva's description had been observed to embark at Dover for Calais; and the colonel, accompanied by a detective named Twemlow, at once started off

with the intention of getting upon her track and following her up. As for me, however, I was so profoundly convinced that this was a wrong scent that I declined to join in the pursuit, and remained in London.

It was curious, but in less than half an hour after the colonel's departure from London I was inspired with a brilliant idea that had not hitherto occurred to either of us. I hurried to the nearest post-office, and telegraphed to the colonel at Calais, "Shall we offer a reward for information leading to recovery?" Then I strolled down to my Club, and just as I was about to sit down to luncheon, my special chum, Ned Mildmay, strolled in, accompanied by a tall and singularly handsome man, a stranger. Glancing round the room, Ned presently spotted me, and at once approached and shook hands, introducing his friend as Sir Reginald Elphinstone.

We chatted for a few minutes upon indifferent subjects, during which my friend seized the opportunity to inform me that he had just obtained his post-captaincy; and then, with the blunt frankness of a sailor, he must needs turn to his friend and explain—

"Poor Dick, here, is the man whose sweetheart, Miss Hepburn, has so unaccountably vanished, you must know, Sir Reginald."

"Indeed?" said the baronet, looking at me in some surprise. "Then let me hasten to offer you the expression of my deepest sympathy, Mr. Berrington. I can scarcely imagine a more acutely painful situation than

yours must be at the present moment. Have you discovered any clue to the young lady's whereabouts?"

Of course I had to go over the whole heart-breaking business to them; but I will do my two listeners the justice to say that they listened to my story with the deepest, kindest, and most sympathetic interest, asking a pertinent question here and there that showed how far removed was their feeling from mere idle curiosity. And it was during this recital that certain doubts, that had gradually been growing in my mind, as to the skill of the two detectives we had employed, first found audible, although unconscious, expression, as I now discovered.

"Are these two men—Keen and Twemlow I think you called them—considered *good* detectives?" inquired Sir Reginald, after I had finished my story.

"Pretty good, I believe," answered I. "Keen, at least, is considered so, according to what Colonel Hepburn tells me; but as to the man Twemlow, I know nothing about him."

"Well," said Sir Reginald, with a very friendly smile, "I hope, Mr. Berrington, you will pardon the remark, but you have spoken of these men in a manner which leads me to think you have no very great confidence in either of them. If this be so, why not employ somebody else? In a case of this kind every minute is of importance; for the 'scent,' so to speak, is growing steadily colder. And this brings me to what I have in my mind. I feel certain that you would like to have the very best skilled assistance

obtainable, and I am sanguine enough to believe that I can direct you where to find that assistance"—

"If you can, Sir Reginald, I shall be more deeply obliged to you than I can find any words to express," I interrupted.

"Not at all," protested my new friend; "it is not worth mentioning. I happen, however, to know a man who struck me as being wonderfully shrewd and clever as a detective. My wife, you must know, was robbed of a very considerable amount of almost priceless jewellery a few months ago, under circumstances of the most baffling description, which I need not weary you by detailing now. Let it suffice to say that I employed what was considered to be the very best talent in Great Scotland Yard for its recovery—without success. I had quite made up my mind that my wife's diamonds—valued by us even beyond their actual worth, on account of the extraordinary circumstances under which they came into our possession—were irretrievably lost, when I happened to hear of the man I refer to,—a man named Mapleson,—and I put the affair into his hands, with scarcely a hope of success, I admit, for the robbery was by this time a month old. Nevertheless, the man not only succeeded in putting his hand upon the criminal, but managed the affair so adroitly that the whole of the stolen jewellery was recovered. Now, should you think of employing additional assistance, I really would recommend you to try this man, for his ability impressed me as being simply marvellous."

"I thank you with all my heart," said I, whipping out my notebook. "Kindly favour me with his address, if you please."

The baronet gave it me; and then, as we sat down to luncheon together, the conversation wandered away to other topics.

After luncheon I drove to Park Lane, to see what answer the colonel had returned to my telegram. The document stood conspicuously on the library chimney-piece, and on opening it I read—

"Twemlow thinks it would be unwise at present. We have obtained a clue, and are starting for Paris per next train."

"Unwise?" thought I. "Just so. This wretched Twemlow is doubtless afraid that if a good substantial reward were offered we might obtain information that would lead to poor Eva's speedy discovery, and his services would then be no longer required. And the colonel—poor simple creature—has not the wit to see this. Well, this decides me. I will act for myself, and put the matter into this man Mapleson's hands on my own account, let the consequences be what they may."

This resolution strongly impressed upon me the probability that I might be detained in town for some time, which in turn suggested the desirability of my occupying quarters of my own; I accordingly drove, in the first instance, to my old rooms in Arlington Street, and finding them still vacant, gave instructions to have them

got ready at once; then on to Mapleson's address, which I found to be a very snug villa in a quiet street off the South Lambeth Road.

In answer to my pressure upon the electric button beside the door, a smart maid appeared, who informed me that Mr. Mapleson was at home. Would I please to walk in? I would, and I did; and, upon replying "Yes" to the smart maid's question whether my call related to business, I was shown into a small room at the back of the house, the walls of which were completely covered with clever water-colour sketches, and which had a pleasant outlook upon a large well-kept garden. As I strolled to the window and glanced through it, I observed the smart maid tripping down one of the gravel paths toward a rather stout, broad-shouldered man, who, in knicker-bockers and shirt-sleeves, with a very broad-brimmed straw hat upon his head, was working away, with a pair of scissors and a basket, upon a rose-bush. The maid approached this individual and said something to him, whereupon he glanced toward the house, handed the basket and scissors to the maid, and advanced along the path the girl had just traversed. This enabled me to see that the man—who, of course, was Mr. Mapleson—was, albeit rather inclined to be stout, a powerful, athletic-looking individual, nearly or quite six feet high in his stockings, with closely-cropped black curly hair, and a magnificent beard, of which he was evidently proud, for he stroked it in a caressing, absent-minded way as he

walked up the path. I heard his heavy tread as he entered the house, passed the room in which I was standing, and went upstairs; then came the sudden sound of water under pressure flowing from a tap, the jarring clank of its sudden stoppage, a sound of brisk splashing for a moment, a short interval of silence, heavy footsteps upon the stairs, the opening of the door, and the man with the beard stood before me.

"Mr. Mapleson?" asked I.

"At your service, sir," answered he, with a bow.

"Mr. Mapleson," said I, "your name was mentioned to me to-day in connection with a jewel robbery that occurred a few months ago at Sir Reginald Elphinstone's place, and what I then heard of your ability has induced me to call upon you now with the object of securing your services in the elucidation of a very painful mystery."

"Pray be seated, sir," requested Mr. Mapleson, handing me a chair, and taking one himself. "May I ask whom I have the honour of addressing?" he continued.

I gave him my name.

"Ah!" he remarked. "Then perhaps I am not very far out in guessing that your business relates to the disappearance of Miss Hepburn, the Australian heiress?"

"It certainly does," I answered, in some surprise; "though how *you*—a total stranger—should come to guess it I cannot imagine."

"No?" asked he, with a smile. "Then it is clear that you have not looked at to-day's and yesterday's papers,

which are full of the story, coupled with the most astonishing and contradictory rumours, which, however, we need not waste time by discussing. I understood you to say, just now, that you wish to engage my services in connection with the affair?"

"Yes," said I. "Colonel Hepburn, you must know, no sooner recognised the fact that his niece was really missing than he went to Great Scotland Yard and put the case into the hands of the people there; but I, as Miss Hepburn's *fiancé*, am by no means satisfied with the way in which the case is being conducted, and, recognising the fact that time is of incalculable value, I have determined to have the matter taken up and investigated on wholly independent lines forthwith. And what Sir Reginald Elphinstone told me to-day about you has decided me to entrust this task to you."

"I see," observed Mapleson. "I am very much obliged to you, and also to Sir Reginald Elphinstone. And now, please tell me absolutely everything you know about the case."

I did so; the recital, and my answers to the numerous questions Mapleson put to me, occupying very nearly two hours, during which the detective made most voluminous notes in shorthand in a tolerably capacious book.

"Now," said Mapleson, closing and pocketing his notebook, when I had furnished him with every scrap of information I possessed upon the matter, and had made

him fully acquainted with everything that had been done, and was still in progress, "the first person I must see is Miss Hepburn's maid. Can you procure me an interview with her?"

I answered, "Yes, certainly;" and, leaving the house, we drove forthwith to Park Lane, where the girl Ferris was at once summoned to the library, and submitted to a searching examination by Mapleson.

The more I saw of this man, the better I liked him. I liked, first, the resolute, straightforward way in which he went to work to secure *facts*, none of which were too insignificant for his notice. Then I liked the inexhaustible patience with which he listened to everything the maid had to say, allowing her to tell her story in her own way, and putting no questions to her until that story was quite finished. And I particularly liked the quiet, easy, genial manner in which he conducted the process of questioning —a manner which was eminently calculated to put the questioned person completely at ease, and thus to elicit many items of information that the examinee might otherwise easily have been flurried into forgetting.

Ferris's statement did not amount to very much, consisting chiefly of a minute description of the attire and jewellery worn by Eva at the time of her disappearance, an almost equally minute account of her demeanour on that morning and particularly while dressing to go out for her walk,—from which it appeared that my sweetheart's manner had exhibited a total absence of anything

approaching to nervousness, anxiety, or preoccupation,—and the fact that she carried absolutely nothing out of the house with her excepting her parasol and a small handbag containing her purse and pocket-handkerchief. Neither was there a scrap of her clothing missing except the garments that she actually wore when leaving the house. But with this statement, meagre though it was, Mapleson expressed himself perfectly satisfied. He had a short interview with the other servants, and then left the house, promising to communicate with me at my new address in Arlington Street as soon as he had anything worth communicating. This was on a Saturday, Eva having disappeared on the previous Thursday only, although the anguish and anxiety of mind I had endured during that brief period of less than forty-eight hours made the time appear at least a fortnight in duration.

That same evening I settled, with Mitchell, my man, into my new quarters; and on the following day a telegram, addressed to me at Park Lane, acquainted me with the bare fact of the colonel's arrival in Paris.

From that the time dragged on, leaving me in a state of suspense, anxiety, and inaction that threatened to speedily qualify me as an inmate for a madhouse, until the following Friday afternoon, when about four o'clock Mapleson made his appearance at my rooms—from which I had scarcely dared to stir since I had taken possession of them, lest I should happen to be out of the way at an inopportune moment.

"Well?" exclaimed I, starting to my feet as the man entered, and his genial, cheery influence seemed to suffuse the apartment.

"Well, Mr. Berrington," he returned, "I am happy to inform you that I have succeeded in tracing Miss Hepburn up to a certain point—namely, to Gravesend—and there I have lost her—for the present. That being so, I have thought it best to come and consult with you before proceeding further."

"Tell me all about it, please, in your own way," stammered I, so greatly overcome with this unexpected news that I could scarcely articulate intelligibly.

"Well, to put the whole thing into a nutshell, Mr. Berrington, Miss Hepburn was first decoyed by the Comtesse de Ste. Servine—whom I believe you know—into her house in Grosvenor Square, and from thence conveyed to Hammersmith in a close carriage, from which, at a rather unfrequented spot, about three-quarters of a mile below the bridge, on the south side of the river, she was transferred to a steam launch, in which she was conveyed to Gravesend and placed on board a Russian yacht called the *Olga*. This was on Thursday afternoon and evening, and early on Friday morning the yacht sailed—or rather, was towed—down the river, the tug leaving her off the North Foreland."

"Then it *is* a case of abduction, as I have feared from the first!" gasped I. "And in a yacht, too, from which there is no possibility of escape!"

The hideous horror of the pictures which my imagination drew, as I thought of my poor lost darling at sea, and utterly at the mercy of some brutal, pitiless ruffian, was so overpowering that for a moment or two it seemed as though my brain would turn with the agony of it. Then I was brought to myself by hearing Mapleson's voice say—

"Steady, Mr. Berrington; steady. This will *never* do; you must pull yourself together, my good sir, and help me, or how are we to find out where the young lady is being taken?"

"Help you, Mapleson?" I exclaimed, looking up at him helplessly from the seat into which I had staggered. "How on earth am I to help you?"

"Well," he answered, "now that you know what has become of Miss Hepburn, I suppose you will be for rescuing her without loss of time, will you not? And to do that, we must first find out where the yacht is going. Now, I understand that you are a yachtsman, and I therefore thought that probably you could put me in the way of making that discovery as well as anybody, and that you would be glad to assist me, for the sake of the occupation."

"Of course, of course," I eagerly assented. "*Anything* will be better than the dreadful idleness I have been compelled to submit to these last four days. Now, we want to find out where this yacht is bound to. Did you make any inquiries at Gravesend?"

"Yes," was the answer. "I asked everybody I could find who would be in the least likely to know, and the only answer I could get was that she was bound on a cruise. One or two of the people I inquired of seemed to think it was rather a longish cruise, from a word or two that dropped from the men."

"Does this vessel—what is her name, again?—does she carry an English crew?" asked I.

"No; all Russian, so I was told," answered Mapleson. "Her name is the *Olga*."

"The *Olga*!" I exclaimed, now catching the name for the first time. "Why, Mapleson, my dear fellow, I *know* the vessel—a large topsail schooner. She was fitting out at Southampton for a cruise, said to be round the world, about a month ago. She belongs to Prince Alexis Zagvazdin, who was in London on Saturday last; for I saw him in the street and bowed to him, just as I was leaving here on my way to you."

Mapleson whistled, and then sank into deep thought for a few seconds.

"Do you think," asked he at last, "that this Prince Zagvazdin has had any hand, directly or indirectly, in Miss Hepburn's abduction?"

"I can scarcely believe it," I answered. "He is a married man, you know. And, apart from that, the scandal of such an attempt, if brought home to him, would simply ruin him with his Government. N—o, I do not think he is mixed up in the matter."

"Do you know him to speak to?" demanded Mapleson.

"Oh yes," said I; "I have met him often this summer."

"Very well, then, Mr. Berrington," said my companion. "I will set you a little task for to-night. Find Prince Zagvazdin, if he is still in town, and ascertain from him, without exciting his suspicions, if possible, what he knows about the movements of his yacht. And contrive a way of casually introducing the name of the Comtesse de Ste. Servine into your conversation, and just make a mental note of what he says—if anything—about her. I will be with you again to-morrow morning at—what time shall we say?"

"Come and breakfast with me at eight o'clock," said I.

"Thank you, I will," exclaimed Mapleson, in his hearty manner, as he rose to take his leave. "Nothing like stirring early, Mr. Berrington. We are going to have a busy day to-morrow, unless I am greatly mistaken."

The man was no sooner out of the house than I left it also, going first to the Army and Navy, and then to one or two other clubs in fruitless search for the man I wanted. At length, by good luck, I ran up against my friend Ned Mildmay, who, in answer to an inquiry of mine, said that he had parted from the prince not a quarter of an hour previously, on the steps of the Royal Thames Yacht Club-house, in Albemarle Street. Thither I hurried, and was fortunate enough to find my man

apparently settled there for the evening. Every man in the place was, luckily, talking "shop," so I was for once spared the rather embarrassing inquiries and condolences respecting the disappearance of my sweetheart that met me almost everywhere else; and, watching my opportunity, I cut dexterously into the conversation by describing the excellences revealed by my new schooner during her trial cruise. This, as I hoped and fully intended, provoked a few answering remarks from the owner of the *Olga*, from which a friendly challenge on my part to a race round the Isle of Wight was an easy transition. This obtained for me the information I wanted.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure, my dear fellow," was the answer, "only that, not being likely to require the vessel myself for some time, I have, unfortunately for your proposal, lent her to the Comtesse de Ste. Servine for a cruise round the world, and I understand that madame sailed from Gravesend last Friday. If so, she has had a magnificent run out of the Channel, for the wind has held steadily at south-south-east during the whole week."

"Ay, that she has," assented a big man, who was standing before the empty fireplace with a brandy and soda in his hand. "How long does her Loveliness de Ste. Servine intend to be away?"

"About nine months, I believe," answered the prince.

"Nine months!" ejaculated another man. "Good

heavens! are we to see no more of the divine Marie for nine months? Why, London will be like a desert without her to enliven us. What, in the name of all that is wonderful, has induced her to bolt off in this unexpected fashion, and on a voyage round the world, too?"

"The plea is ill-health; but the motive, I believe, is retrenchment," answered the prince, who, I thought, seemed just a shade restive at the tone of the conversation.

"Retrenchment?" observed the first man who had spoken. "Well, I am not surprised that the comtesse should find it necessary to retrench. But taking a voyage round the world in a yacht is rather a queer method of retrenching, is it not?"

The prince shrugged his shoulders. "It ought not to cost her very much, since she is going quite alone," he remarked. "The *Olga* is always in commission, you know, whether I am using her or not. And, for the rest, the comtesse, I fancy, is quite capable of managing her own affairs."

This was a pretty strong hint to us to change the conversation; but I wanted to know a little more yet, so I ventured upon one more question.

"What route does madame propose to follow?" I asked.

"I really cannot tell you," answered the prince, with a distinct manifestation of impatience; "but from the fact of her having asked me whether I objected to her risking the vessel in the passage through the Straits of Magellan, I

infer that she is going to make for the Pacific by that route. This idle chatter, however, is very dull work, gentlemen. Does nobody want a little flutter with the cards?"

After this, of course, nothing further could be said upon the subject. But I had already learned what it was most vitally important for me to know, namely, the projected route of the *Olga* for several thousands of miles; and if, indeed, Eva were really on board the yacht, as Mapleson had asserted,—and as to which I should, of course, expect him to fully satisfy me on the morrow,—I would be off in pursuit without the unnecessary loss of a moment of time. All the arrangements for my projected wedding tour had long since been made; my own outfit and that of the crew had been on order for some time, and should, indeed, by this time have been delivered on board the *Evangeline*; and the stores for the voyage would also have been in process of delivery had I not during the past week found time to countermand the order—not knowing, under the circumstances, how long the voyage might be delayed, or whether, indeed, it would ever be undertaken at all. But time was now precious, so precious that every *minute* was of value; I therefore made my adieus to the Thames yachtsmen, and, hurrying to the nearest telegraph office, wired two messages, one to the provision people, and one to Purkiss, the skipper of the *Evangeline*, signifying my desire that the provisioning of the yacht should be pro-

ceeded with forthwith, adding in my telegram to Purkiss, instructions that he should have everything ready to start upon the voyage within twenty-four hours, if possible. I was also upon the point of wiring to the colonel to return at once, as I had discovered Eva's whereabouts; but while I was drafting the message it occurred to me that it would be well to fully satisfy myself, first of all, of the correctness of Mapleson's conclusions; for should there prove to be anything wrong with them, it would be a terrible disappointment to the poor fellow—doubtless already consumed by anxiety—to have his hopes raised only to be dashed to the ground again. Besides, the *Olga* had already secured a start of a week; she had the reputation of being a very fast vessel, and a stern chase is a long chase; our voyage was therefore likely to be a somewhat lengthy one, and it would be imperatively necessary to take out a supply of clothing for Eva, as well as to secure a maid, if I could find one who could be induced to go: all these things would take a little time, which would be amply sufficient to enable the colonel to travel from Paris to London.

While considering these matters, the question arose whether it would not be better to charter a steam yacht for the pursuit; but when I came to consider the loss of time that would be involved in looking about for a suitable craft and fitting her out for the voyage, together with the difficulty, loss of time, and deviations from the direct track of the *Olga* involved in renewing the coal

supply from time to time, I came to the conclusion that the employment of steam, under the circumstances, offered no advantage whatever—rather the other way about, if anything, and so determined to adhere to my first intention to make use of the *Evangeline*.

CHAPTER III

MAPLESON MAKES SOME IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES

THE deep, sonorous notes of Big Ben, striking eight, were floating in through the open window of the room in which I was awaiting Mapleson's company at breakfast, when the door was opened, and the man himself was ushered in; his resolute, confident, cheery presence suffusing the apartment as with an atmosphere surcharged with ozone. The ordinary greetings passed between us, and then nothing more was said until the breakfast had been brought in and we had fairly fallen to. No sooner, however, was this the case, than I informed my companion of what I had learned during the previous evening from Prince Zagvazdin.

Mapleson listened attentively to all that I had to say, and then sat ruminating deeply for a minute or two. At length he looked up and said—

"Now, Mr. Berrington, you know this Russian prince, and I do not: do you think that what he said last night is to be implicitly relied on? Because, if so, it appears to me that you have no further need of my services. Your

course is clear; nothing now remains for you to do but to be off after the *Olga* as fast as ever you can. There is one point, however, that must not be overlooked, which is this: the comtesse is a countrywoman of the prince's,—she is a born Russian, you know, I suppose, although now a naturalised Frenchwoman,—and I should like to put the question to you, whether, from what you know of Prince Zagvazdin, you think he would assist a countrywoman in such a plot as this, by quietly and consistently misrepresenting the comtesse's intentions with regard to her proposed route?"

"No," said I, "I do *not* think so. It would never do for him to be associated ever so remotely in such a scandalous transaction as this. It would be too risky altogether. Why, if it were to get to the ears of the Czar—as it certainly would—that Zagvazdin were directly implicated in this abduction of an Englishwoman—an heiress, and a prominent figure in society—the fellow would certainly be sent to Siberia, upon some plausible pretext. No, I do not believe the prince would have anything to do with it; and, apart from the danger of it, I do not think he is that sort of man. And yet the fact is indisputable that he has lent the comtesse his yacht, thus furnishing her with the means of carrying out her audacious plans. But, of course, he will say that he had no knowledge of those plans, and my own impression is that in so saying he would only be speaking the truth. There seems but one thing to be done, Mapleson: we

must endeavour to secure independent evidence of the comtesse's intentions, and with that object, I think you had better run down to Southampton, and, by interviewing the different people who have had a hand in fitting out the *Olga* for her voyage, endeavour to obtain an inkling of her destination. Something respecting it must surely have leaked out somewhere. Ah! a good idea!" I continued, as an inspiration flashed across my brain: "find out, if you can, where the *Olga's* charts and directories were purchased, and get a list of them; they will throw as much light as anything we are otherwise likely to learn upon the places it is intended to visit. And now, before we go any further, I want you to tell me all that you have been doing during this past week, and what grounds you have for believing that Miss Hepburn has been carried off in the *Olga*."

"Quite so," assented Mapleson. "You remember, of course, that it was on Saturday afternoon last—a week ago to-day—that you called upon me. It was just seven o'clock when I left you at Colonel Hepburn's house in Park Lane, and from there I sauntered as far as the Savile Club (of which I am a member), and had some dinner.

"I had been giving the matter of Miss Hepburn's disappearance my profoundest consideration during my walk, and viewing it in the light of what you had told me, and what I had learned from the maid Ferris and the other servants, I was strongly disposed to believe the

disappearance was involuntary on the young lady's part. Still, it is an element of my system of working not to allow myself to be influenced by *appearances*; there is nothing like *facts* as guides to the elucidation of a mystery, and the man who can accumulate the greatest number of facts is the man who—other things, such as intelligence, and so on, being equal—will soonest arrive at a correct conclusion. So I set myself diligently to the task of considering what the facts of the case really were, and by the time that I reached the Savile I had got it firmly impressed upon my mind that a young lady of very great wealth had disappeared under circumstances of a singularly mysterious and suspicious character, and that, if she never reappeared, somebody would benefit very materially by the circumstance. I next asked myself *who* was the person that would be the beneficiary under such circumstances; and, remembering all that you had told me, the answer was, *Colonel Hepburn*, undoubtedly. Now do not interrupt me, please, unless to ask a question, because I know exactly what you would say, having said it to myself the moment that the colonel's name suggested itself to me. I said that Colonel Hepburn was an officer and a gentleman, moving in the best society, and possessing a reputation—so far as I knew—beyond suspicion, that you had borne witness to his devoted attachment to his niece, and that his establishment in Park Lane was *primâ facie* evidence that he was in affluent circumstances, and not in need of the pecuniary assistance that his

niece's fortune would give him. I had reached this point in my cogitations when I arrived at the Savile.

"On entering the club, I found that Miss Hepburn's disappearance was the all-absorbing topic of conversation; pretty nearly everybody was discussing it, and the theories that were advanced in explanation of it were as ingenious and amusing as they were, for the most part, improbable. My opinion upon the matter was asked almost as soon as I made my appearance; but I declined to hazard one, preferring to listen, upon the off-chance that something might be said which would furnish me with a little additional information. I sat down to dinner within earshot of three men who were discussing the matter with more than usual animation, and before my meal was over I had heard one or two things that rather opened my eyes; one of them being that, prior to Miss Hepburn's arrival in England, her uncle had been in decidedly straitened circumstances, owing, it was said, to the long years of illness that had preceded his wife's death; and that, after that event, the colonel had found it necessary to locate himself in very cheap bachelor quarters somewhere off St. James Street. Another thing that rather astonished me—and that I feel certain you knew nothing about—was the statement, made by a man I knew pretty well, that Colonel Hepburn had latterly developed a growing habit of frequenting a certain club—of which my friend was a member—notorious for the heavy gambling that was carried on there, and it was

more than hinted that the colonel had sustained some heavy losses at play.

"I finished my dinner, and soon afterwards got hold of my friend, and with some difficulty induced him to take me along to the club he had mentioned. Here, it being still early in the evening and play not having commenced, the talk was, as at the Savile, mainly about Miss Hepburn's disappearance; but it was evident that among the frequenters of this place the matter was regarded chiefly from the standpoint of how it would affect the colonel. And before I left it had become impressed upon me that the general view of the *habitués* was that, if anything had happened to Miss Hepburn, it would probably prove an uncommonly fortunate thing for her uncle, as rendering unnecessary that strict investigation into his stewardship of her affairs which must inevitably follow upon his niece's marriage.

"This, however, was not all that I heard. On more than one occasion the colonel's name was coupled with that of the Comtesse de Ste. Servine in such a way as to suggest that nothing would please the gallant officer better than to find himself in a position to marry the lovely widow; and the opinion was freely expressed that the comtesse would be more than willing to marry him, had he but a fortune at his back big enough to indulge her in her countless extravagances. I also heard enough to convince me that my friend's statement as to the colonel's gambling losses was absolutely true.

"This completed the measure of my discoveries on that first night, but they furnished me with ample food for reflection as I walked homeward about eleven o'clock. They fully confirmed the conclusion I had arrived at during the earlier part of the evening—and which you wanted to denounce as monstrous a little while ago—that Colonel Hepburn is the individual who will substantially, and to an enormous extent, profit by his niece's disappearance, should she not be found; and the reference to the Comtesse de Ste. Servine, and his reputed admiration of her, pointed to a possible motive for Miss Hepburn's disappearance—provided, of course, that the colonel happened to be an inhuman monster, of which, however, there was not a particle of evidence.

"The net result of my ruminations was a determination to make a few inquiries about the comtesse on the following day—Sunday—with the object of finding out what I could about her antecedents, her habits, her character; and also, incidentally, what amount of truth there might be in the story of the colonel's *penchant* for her.

"Now, I do not know whether you are aware of it, but in my spare moments I am an enthusiastic water-colour painter, and those who are supposed to be judges have been good enough to say that my work in that line manifests ability almost amounting to genius. This fact has given me the *entrée* into a rather exclusive set of people, and enables me to penetrate to many a *salon*

from which I should otherwise find myself hopelessly excluded. I thus had no difficulty in gaining access, last Sunday, by a little judicious manœuvring, to one of the comtesse's most intimate friends, and from that person I gleaned a good deal of very interesting information. I learned, for instance, that Marie, Comtesse de Ste. Servine, is a woman of Russian birth and parentage, said to be—and certainly not looking more than—twenty-seven years of age; that she is bewilderingly lovely in face and person; that she was married at the age of seventeen to the Comte de Ste. Servine, a French nobleman, whose estates are situate somewhere on the Mediterranean shore, not far from Marseilles; and that at the age of twenty-three—that is to say, somewhere about four years ago—she was left a widow, without family. I understand that she is very fond of gaiety; is of such recklessly extravagant habits that she is for ever in pecuniary difficulties; and—although no breath of scandal has ever touched her—is thought to be scarcely so simple and innocent of disposition as the gentle, childlike, confiding glances of her lovely blue eyes, and her playful, caressing manner might lead a stranger to believe. Finally, she is popularly supposed to be untroubled by the possession of anything so inconvenient as a heart or a conscience, but is known to be a great admirer of handsome men, and is thought to entertain rather more than a passing fancy for Colonel Hepburn, despite the disparity of age between herself and him.

"This was practically all that I was able to learn about the comtesse from my society friend; but it interested me so much—especially the part that coupled her name, however distantly, with that of the colonel—that I determined to learn a little more if possible. Now, you can learn a great deal about people from their servants; servants often see traits of character in a master or mistress that are never revealed to others, and they also become cognisant of more or less interesting episodes in their employers' lives that are unsuspected by the world at large. Therefore, as the comtesse had probably not taken her entire household with her, I thought I would try to get hold of one of her late servants.

"With this object in view, I next made my way to Grosvenor Square, and having on the way invented a plausible pretext for so doing, advanced boldly to the house recently inhabited by the comtesse, and knocked loudly at the door. It was probably quite ten minutes before my summons was answered by an elderly, sour-faced woman, who informed me that the comtesse was out of town, and that, for her part, she didn't know when she would be back. I affected to be greatly disconcerted by this intelligence, and asked the sour-faced woman whether she could furnish me with the address of any of the servants. The sour-faced woman curtly informed me that she could not, and shut the door in my face, thus effectually cutting short the dialogue.

"It happened, however, very fortunately, as it turned

out, that at the moment of my asking for the address of the servants, a very neat, respectable-looking young woman came out from the adjoining house with a Prayer-Book in her hand, leading me to the conclusion that she was about to attend afternoon service. This girl heard my inquiry, and, as I noticed, paused an instant irresolutely; went on again; looked back after she had walked a few yards, and, seeing me leaving the house, stopped, with so manifest an inclination to address me that I followed and joined her, unhesitatingly.

"'I beg your pardon, sir,' said she, as I came up to her, 'but I thought I heard you asking just now for the address of some of the countess's servants. Which of them was it that you was pleased to want, sir?'

"'Why,' said I, 'any of them would do; but I want to see one of the maids, if possible.'

"She looked at me intently for some moments, as though wondering what on earth I could possibly want with one of the comtesse's maids, and debating within herself whether she would be doing right to tell me something that she evidently knew; but at length, seemingly reassured in a measure by my tolerably respectable appearance, she said—

"'I believe most of the countess's servants have been sent back to the château, in France; but Susan Bingham, one of the parlour-maids, who happens to be a friend of mine, is still in London, looking out for another situation.'

"'Susan Bingham,' said I, 'will doubtless be able to

tell me what I want to know. Have you any objection to giving me her address?'

"Again the girl hesitated, upon which I told her that I simply wanted to ask Susan a few questions, which, if they were answered satisfactorily, would win a substantial reward. And thereupon I secured the address I wanted, and, jumping into a cab, drove off in quest of further information.

"To my disappointment, the girl was out when I reached what proved to be her mother's house; but I chatted with the parent, and contrived to so thoroughly ingratiate myself with her that by the time of Susan's return the suspicion with which I had been at first regarded was completely dispelled, and the girl was enjoined by her mother to tell me all that I wanted to know.

"I had to lead up to my subject gradually, and with some circumspection; for I found the girl rather shy, and, as her mother had at first been, decidedly inclined to suspect that behind my questions lay something inimical to herself; but I eventually succeeded in gaining her confidence and inducing her to talk freely.

"In this way I learned from her that the Comtesse de Ste. Servine is exceedingly harsh and domineering in her manner to her servants, treating them with no consideration whatever, and exacting the most slavish obedience from them; seeming, indeed, to regard them as brute beasts, or machines, rather than as of the same clay as

herself. Bingham also credits her with the possession of an exceedingly violent and vindictive temper, over which she has the most perfect control while in the presence of her equals, but which she vents relentlessly upon the unfortunate beings under her. Altogether, the portrait which this girl drew of her mistress was anything but flattering, so much the reverse, indeed, that I soon began to suspect a strong dash of personal animosity in the colouring—a suspicion which was well-grounded, as you will presently hear.

"I had by this time learned as much of madame's character and temper as I desired to know, so I turned the conversation in the direction of her friends and acquaintance. Of these I found that she had a very large circle; your own name, as well as those of Miss Hepburn and the colonel, being mentioned among them. I asked a few unimportant questions about one and another, and then spoke about Colonel Hepburn, and it was at once apparent by the girl's manner that he was in some way associated with the grievance from which she considered she was suffering. I will not enter at large into all that was said, but the gist of the story amounted to this: The colonel was a very frequent visitor at the comtesse's house, and was often admitted when the lady was 'at home' to nobody else. The servants believed that he had on more than one occasion supplied her with money, and there gradually arose a suspicion among them that some feeling stronger than mere friendship existed between the two.

At this stage of Susan's story the girl became very discursive and apologetic, so that I had the utmost difficulty in keeping her to the point; but she eventually admitted that, animated by an overwhelming curiosity to discover how far the suspicions of the servants' hall were just, she took measures to put the matter beyond dispute, and, in fact, constituted herself a spy upon her mistress. For some time her amiable endeavours had no result; but ultimately, while secreted precariously in the drawing-room—which, it appears, was divided from madame's boudoir by a *portière* only—she overheard the colonel passionately urging the comtesse to marry him, and also heard the comtesse reply that she would willingly do so were the colonel but as rich as his niece, but that, as he was not, the thing was altogether absurd, and not to be thought of. Prayers, reproaches, protestations, were in vain resorted to by the infatuated man to move the comtesse from her decision; her sole answer was that money was a vital necessity with her; that, whatever else she went without, money, and plenty of it, she *must* have; and that when the colonel found himself possessed of this in sufficient abundance he might repeat his proposal, but not until then. At which heartless answer the girl avers that Hepburn, in a voice that betrayed the strength of his conflicting emotions, asked this she-devil whether she would marry him in the event of his niece's property becoming his, and she said 'Yes,' and not only so, but that *she would help him to make it his*, if he liked.

"Such talk as this terrified the girl, as well it might, and, waiting to hear no more, she devoted all her attention to the task of effecting her escape from the room. In this she was successful, and for a time she had sense enough to hold her tongue about what she had heard. Not for long, however; the discussion of the probable relations existing between the comtesse and the colonel continued in the servants' hall, and at length that feeling of vanity which the possession of fuller information is apt to generate in the minds of people of the Bingham class betrayed the girl into a statement to her fellow-servants that she had overheard an interview between Colonel Hepburn and the comtesse in which the former had proposed to and been refused by the latter. This, as might have been expected, soon reached the ears of the comtesse through the channel of the lady's-maid, with the result that poor foolish Susan Bingham was dismissed on the spot, with awful threats of what the comtesse would do to her if the girl dared to repeat what madame chose to designate as her awful lies. This occurred about a month ago.

"I gave the girl a gratuity for her information, and extracted from her a promise not to accept another situation without first letting me know, and then took a long walk in the Park to ruminate upon what I had heard. Before I reached home that night a very shrewd suspicion of something approaching the truth had entered my head, and I thought I began to see the direction in which my

further researches were to lie; still, I was determined to adhere to my regular system and follow the scent from point to point, rather than risk the loss of it by attempting any short cuts, so to speak, and in accordance with this resolution I called at Peter Robinson's early on the following (Monday) morning, and, before they began to get busy, interviewed the people who had attended to Miss Hepburn.

"What I learned from them, however, only confirmed what you had already told me; and I then decided to call on Lady Mary Brooks, and ascertain from her, if possible, the direction which Miss Hepburn was taking when the two last met. And it was while I was on my way to her ladyship's house that I encountered the stroke of luck that sent me at last fairly on the trail.

"It came about in this way. I was walking along Oxford Street — the street in which I had practically made up my mind that the leading incident of Miss Hepburn's disappearance must have taken place—and keeping my eyes wide open on the lookout for anyone who by any possible chance might be able to throw any light upon the circumstance, when my glances fell upon a crossing-sweeper at the Bond Street crossing that I remembered having seen there on several previous occasions. I sauntered up to the poor old fellow, and, giving him a shilling, entered into conversation with him. Gradually and artfully I led the conversation up to the topic of the disappearance, and no sooner were we fairly arrived at it than the old boy became garrulous enough.

He knew Miss Hepburn well, it seemed,—she being one of his most generous patrons,—and saw her on the day of her disappearance at a quarter to one o'clock, the time being impressed upon his memory by the fact that at the moment that she dropped her contribution into his palm—'a bran'-new harf-a-crown it was, sir'—he heard the chimes ringing the three-quarters. She was walking westward, and had paused to say a kind word or two to my informant, when a dashing brougham and pair came up Bond Street, and, pulling up sharp by the side of the pavement, a lady put her head out of the window and entered into conversation with Miss Hepburn. They chatted for nearly five minutes; and then Miss Hepburn, taking a small memorandum-book from her pocket, wrote something in it, tore out the leaf, folded and addressed it, and beckoned to my humble friend, whose name I now learned was Larry. Larry was despatched to find a commissionaire, which he did in about two minutes; and upon the return of the pair, Miss Hepburn handed the note to the messenger, gave him a shilling and some instructions, stepped into the brougham, and was driven away.

"I asked Larry whether he knew the owner of the carriage, and if he thought he could find the commissionaire again, and his reply was satisfactory on both heads. He did not personally know the owner of the brougham, he admitted rather reluctantly; but, dazzled by her astonishing beauty, he asked a friend of his—the policeman on the beat—who came up just as the vehicle

dashed away down Oxford Street, and that omniscient individual informed him that she was the Countess of—of—dashed if he hadn't forgot the name, after all. Asked whether perchance it might be the Comtesse de Ste. Servine, he at once acknowledged that it was so. As to the commissionaire, if he wasn't off on a *h*errand, Larry knew where to put his 'and upon him in a jiffy. And indeed he did so.

"I did not choose that so communicative a person as Mr. Larry should learn my business with the commissionaire, so I gave the former another shilling in token of my appreciation of his conversational powers, and invited the latter to follow me along the street. After we had proceeded some distance, I frankly informed my companion who I was, and then questioned him as to how he had disposed of the note given him by Miss Hepburn, upon which he informed me that it bore the address of Colonel Hepburn, No. — Park Lane, and upon arriving at the house he encountered a military-looking gentleman who said that he was Colonel Hepburn, and took the note, the messenger leaving again before the door was opened.

"Now, Mr. Berrington, my belief is that Miss Hepburn's note contained an intimation that she had gone to take luncheon with the comtesse, and that the colonel, recognising in that fact the first step in a diabolical plot, destroyed the note, and suppressed his knowledge of the information it contained!

"My way was now quite clear before me. Miss Hepburn had undoubtedly been taken to the comtesse's house about one o'clock on that eventful Thursday, and the next point was to find out when and how she left it. I thought my unknown friend, the maid belonging to the house next door, or some of her fellow-servants, might be able to shed some light upon this question, so I went straight to the house, and, sending in my card, told the servant that I wanted to see his mistress on a matter of importance. This procured me an interview with a very stately little grey-haired lady, whom I informed that I was a detective employed in investigating the mysterious disappearance of Miss Hepburn—of which she had probably heard—and that, 'from information received,' I thought it possible that some of her servants might be able to throw a little light upon the matter. Would she permit me to put a few questions to them in her presence? She was rather frightened at first, but upon my fully explaining to her exactly what I wanted she consented at once, and her entire household was summoned.

"Of course I did not enlighten the servants as to my business, but confined myself to simply questioning them, with the result that I learned that one of the comtesse's carriages—an omnibus—had appeared at madame's door about three o'clock, into which a lady, who seemed very ill and almost helpless, was carefully transferred, after which the comtesse and two women-servants got into the vehicle, the blinds of which were drawn, and the 'bus

drove rapidly away down South Audley Street. I was also informed that about five o'clock on that same afternoon two omnibuses belonging to the South Eastern Railway had driven up to the comtesse's door, had been rapidly loaded with an immense quantity of luggage, and had driven away again with two men-servants apparently in charge. And finally, on the Friday, a general exodus of the remaining servants had occurred; the story given by them being that their mistress had gone away on a yachting cruise, and that they were, in pursuance of her orders, returning to her château in the south of France. I very strictly questioned my informants as to the personal appearance of the supposed invalid, and although it was stated that she had been carefully wrapped up, they had seen enough of her to enable me to identify her beyond all question as Miss Hepburn.

"My next business was to find where she had been driven, and here I had an infinity of trouble—so much, indeed, that it took me until late on Thursday evening to trace that 'bus to and over Hammersmith Bridge and along the right bank of the river to the point where the party embarked in the steam launch. Then, yesterday, I found the launch, and learned from the crew that she had been on charter by the comtesse nearly a week, and that about two o'clock on the eventful Thursday afternoon they had received a telegram to get steam at once and be in readiness to convey the comtesse and her invalid sister to Gravesend, where, late in the evening, they had

arrived alongside a large yacht named the *Olga*, into which the whole party had transhipped themselves. These men had assisted in transferring the invalid sister from the launch to the yacht, and had therefore had a very good opportunity of seeing her. They described her dress as well as they could, and their description tallied with Ferris's account of the dress Miss Hepburn wore when she went out in the morning; and upon confronting them with Miss Hepburn's photograph, they all—there were three of them—declared it was the same lady. Finally, during the process of transhipment the invalid's pocket-handkerchief was dropped, and as nobody seemed to notice it, the engineer of the launch, struck by the beauty of the lace border, slipped it into his pocket. I bought it of him for five shillings, and here it is. Do you recognise it as having belonged to Miss Hepburn?"

CHAPTER IV

PREPARATIONS FOR THE CHASE

I TOOK the handkerchief into my hand and looked at it. Yes, it was Eva's, beyond all question; soiled though it was by the dirty hands of the man who had purloined it, I recognised it in an instant, not only by the pattern of the lace edging but also by the peculiar and fanciful character of the initials "E. H." embroidered in the corner. Yes, it was Eva's; and all doubt as to her identity with the supposed invalid sister who had been conveyed on board the *Olga* was at an end. Not a shadow of distrust remained upon my mind on that point.

"Yes," I said to Mapleson, "this handkerchief certainly belonged to Miss Hepburn, and it was a lucky thought of yours to bring it. It leaves no room for question as to the justice of the conclusions at which you have arrived in this matter, and I must compliment you highly upon the keen sagacity that you have displayed in the conduct of your investigations. There is one thing, however, Mapleson, that I cannot understand about it. How on

earth did this woman contrive to get Miss Hepburn to go with her passively and in the character of an invalid?"

Mapleson stared at me for a moment in astonishment, then burst into a roar of laughter.

"Why, Mr. Berrington," he exclaimed, "is it possible that you are puzzled by so simple a thing as that? Why, they drugged her, of course,—drugged her until she was stupefied and didn't know what she was doing,—and in that condition passed her off as an invalid. That is as plain as the nose on one's face."

"Possibly it is," I retorted, rather nettled; "but I must admit that it did not occur to me. There is another thing that is probably also ridiculously simple, yet I cannot understand it. How is it that none of these people from whom you got your information connected the somewhat strange occurrences they witnessed with Ev—with Miss Hepburn's disappearance?"

"Why should they?" asked Mapleson. "You must remember that when the occurrences to which you refer took place, it was not known that Miss Hepburn—or anybody else, for that matter—had disappeared. And when that fact *had* become known, what should lead my crossing-sweeping friend Larry to suppose that such a very commonplace incident as that of the brougham was in any way connected with it? Or why should madame la comtesse's next-door neighbours, or the crew of the steam launch, suspect *her* of being concerned with such a

crime as abduction? The 'invalid' device was, in my opinion, equally admirable for the boldness of its conception and the coolness of its execution. You must remember, also, that nobody shares with us the knowledge of the motive which has actuated the comtesse in the committal of this crime. For although we obtained our information from the girl Bingham, I do not for one moment believe her intelligent enough to discern the sinister significance of the conversation that she overheard between madame and the colonel."

"Well, it is a most astounding business altogether," I remarked, "and no part of it more so than the colonel's conduct."

"I have no doubt it is—to *you*," conceded Mapleson. "But, bless you, there is nothing astonishing in it to *me*. Colonel Hepburn has, of course, been acting a part all through, and acting it very creditably, too, on the whole. Then the plot is by no means ill-devised, and if the comtesse had only been a little more careful she might have defied detection. Her great mistake was in dismissing Bingham. As a woman of the world, she ought to have recognised the probability that, if dismissed, the girl would talk, sooner or later, and that the talk would be of a nature calculated to arouse grave suspicion in the event of anything befalling Miss Hepburn, and, recognising this, she should have kept Bingham with her and made a friend of her, instead of an enemy. But so it is. In the most carefully-planned crime there is invariably

a weak element which is certain to lead to its discovery sooner or later."

"I suppose so," I assented. "And now, Mapleson, what do you imagine are the intentions of this diabolical comtesse toward Miss Hepburn?"

Mapleson shrugged his shoulders. "Who can tell?" said he. "It appears to me that the woman shirks murder—I mean *direct* murder—murder in its usual forms—as being rather too risky. Therefore she has taken her proposed victim with her on a long sea-voyage in a vessel manned by Russian sailors—men of her own nationality, whom she will probably have no difficulty in influencing and completely moulding to her will, so that whatever she chooses to represent to them they will implicitly believe and stolidly swear to. Very well. The yacht will be certain, sooner or later, to encounter bad weather, and in the midst of it there will be a dreadful accident; the comtesse's dear friend and *compagnon de voyage*—whom nobody knows to be Miss Hepburn—will be washed overboard, or will lose her life in some deplorable way, and there will be an end of it. Your only hope must be either that the bad weather will be so long of coming that you will be able to overtake the *Olga* before it reaches her, or that Miss Hepburn will be resolute and clear-headed enough to be able to take care of herself until you can rescue her."

"Merciful Heaven! what a prospect for the poor girl!" I ejaculated. "Why, she will scarcely dare to eat or

drink lest there should be poison mingled with her food. She will be in peril in some shape or other every moment of her life! And here are we wasting our time in talk while every moment is of vital importance. We must be up and doing at once. Your task now will be to ascertain exactly what charts and directories have been supplied to the *Olga*. The vessel was fitted out at Southampton, and it is therefore probable that whatever charts and books were specially required for this voyage were procured there. Consequently, you had better commence your investigations at Southampton; and as the day is still young, you may possibly get down there in time to do good work before the evening. Should you obtain the information you want at Southampton, you had better go from there on board my yacht—the schooner *Evangeline*, lying off Cowes—see Captain Purkiss, and instruct him on my behalf to complete his stock of charts and books so that it includes everything that has been supplied to the *Olga*. Perhaps I had better give you a note to him to that effect. And keep me advised by wire of all your movements, so that I may know exactly where to find you. That is all, I think. And now, the sooner you are off, the better shall I be pleased."

Five minutes later, Mapleson was rattling along Pall Mall in a cab, on his way to Waterloo Station to catch the Southampton express; while I was wending westward toward the residence of a good-natured lady-friend, whose aid I intended to invoke in the task of procuring a suit-

able maid to take out with me. It was, of course, necessary that I should take this lady-friend fully into my confidence, and I therefore told her everything that Mapleson had discovered, and what my own intentions were; but it was no part of my plans to afford Colonel Hepburn any possible opportunity to thwart me by allowing him to become aware of my intentions, or even to give him a hint of what those intentions were by allowing him to know the nature of the discoveries I had made; I therefore pledged my confidante to the strictest secrecy, and as she was overwhelmed with horror and disgust at the enormity and character of the crime against my sweetheart, I had very little fear of my confidence being betrayed. She entered with the greatest enthusiasm and good-nature upon the task which I wished to impose upon her, and at once undertook the whole responsibility of finding and engaging a suitable woman, as well as seeing that she was provided with an outfit suitable and sufficient for the voyage. I was thus left free to attend to the other pressing matters that still demanded my attention, and with such energy and success did we both work, that on the following Monday evening I found myself steaming down Southampton Water on my way across to Cowes, with the whole of my business completed, and the new maid, baggage and all, on board the boat with me, leaving nothing to be done but to see Mapleson once more, get from him any new information that he might have acquired, and be off to sea forthwith.

Despite the fact that the racing in the Solent was practically ended, there was a very fair show of yachts in Cowes roadstead, conspicuous among them being the stately, beautiful, white-hulled *Evangeline*, gleaming like a vision in the level rays of the setting sun, with her taunt, glistening spars marked in slender lines of burning gold, while the brass-work about her decks, the glass in her scuttles, and her burnished copper glowed and flashed like flame in the ruddy light. We passed close under her stern as the steamer sailed cautiously through the fleet on her way toward the landing-pier, and although the yacht was my own property, and I was therefore perhaps somewhat biassed in my judgment of her, methought that I had never looked upon a more perfect or a more beautiful specimen of naval architecture than this same *Evangeline*. She was a goodly lump of a ship, yet her proportions were adjusted with such cunning nicety that you only became aware of her bulk by comparing her with the craft around her and noting the towering altitude of her spars above theirs. She sat rather deep in the water,—only some two inches of her copper showing amidships,—from which I inferred that my instructions had been fully carried out as to the getting of all necessary stores on board forthwith, yet, even so, she showed a fine bold side out of the water, promising the comfort of dry decks except in downright bad weather. I have never seen a more beautiful hull than hers; with the perfection of grace as to outline, it had every element necessary to the pro-



SHE WAS RIGGED AS A TOPSAIL SCHOONER.

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duction of an immensely powerful sea-boat, while the easy, delicate, flowing curves of the subtly moulded lines gave an unmistakable guarantee of the high speed that she had already proved herself to possess. She was rigged as a topsail schooner, and the spread of her yards was enormous; I have seen many a five-hundred-ton ship with a smaller fore-topsail than hers, while the canvas in her mainsail would have made a complete suit of sails for most traders of her own tonnage. Under her standing bowsprit she carried a beautifully carved and gilt full-length figure of a woman, the features of which were modelled after those of her lovely namesake; a gold cable moulding extending along her sheer-strake relieved the monotony of her white sides, and her substantial bulwarks were pierced by eight ports—four of a side—through which grinned the polished muzzles of as many nine-pound breech-loading rifled guns of the latest and most approved pattern. The racers for an eighteen-pounder of the same pattern showed on the fore deck between the foremast and the forecastle companion; but the weapon itself, with its mountings, was stowed snugly away below, my intention being to keep it there until the *Evangeline* should arrive in the perilous waters of the Eastern Archipelago, where, even in these prosaic days of almost universal steam, it might still prove exceedingly useful upon occasion.

I had wired to Purkiss and to Mapleson the intelligence that I was coming, and had requested the latter to

meet me on board the yacht; I was therefore not surprised to see both men standing near the taffrail, evidently on the lookout for me as the steamer swept past. I waved my hand to attract their attention, and in another moment heard the shrill pipe of the boatswain on board, followed by the hoarse, deep notes of the call, "Launches away!" The little craft was riding to the swinging boom with steam up, and before we reached the harbour she was tearing after us at the full power of her engines, with a clear, glassy wave arching and playing upon each side of her keen stem nearly as high as her gunwale. Twenty minutes later I stood on the sand-white decks of my own good ship, and was receiving the respectful greetings of Purkiss and the cheery salutation of Mapleson, while Mitchell introduced the maid to the chief steward, and gave him the necessary instructions respecting the cabin she was to occupy.

"Well," said I to Mapleson, as I led him and Purkiss aft toward the taffrail, "have you been able to make any further discoveries?"

"Yes," said he. "I got down to Southampton on Saturday, just as the shops were closing, and, jumping into a cab, directed the driver to take me to the leading chart-seller's establishment. He did so, and by great good luck it turned out to be the place at which the *Olga's* people had made all their purchases. I got hold of the proprietor, and asked him if he happened to have any record of the goods he had supplied to the yacht, and by

way of reply he turned up his day-book and showed me the detailed entry. I ran my finger down it, and presently came to 'Chart of Magellan Straits,' and under it, 'Sailing Directory to ditto,' so there can be no doubt, I think, that the comtesse intends to make for that interesting locality direct. There was also a chart of the Pacific Ocean among the other items. I remarked, questioningly, that I supposed it was not often that he was asked for a chart of Magellan Straits, and his reply was that he had never been asked for such a thing before. Then I asked him if he happened to have another copy by him, and he said, 'No, but he could write for one if I wished it.' I suggested wiring instead for it and its accompanying directory, offering to pay the cost of the telegram; but the good man said that would be of no use, as the people in town would have left their place of business by that time, and would not be back until about nine o'clock on Monday morning. That being the case, I asked for and obtained a copy of the complete entry of goods supplied to the *Olga*, with which I took steamer for Cowes, and hunted up our good friend Purkiss here. We went through the list together, striking out everything that Purkiss had already provided; and then, preparing a fair copy of the remainder of the list, I took it upon me to strongly recommend the captain either to run up to town himself, or to despatch Mr. Rogers, the mate there, to purchase everything in the list at the fountain-head, as it were, and return to the ship as early as might be

to-day. Captain Purkiss so far fell in with my views as to send Mr. Rogers up to town yesterday afternoon, and at two o'clock to-day he returned to the ship with everything."

"Excellent, most excellent!" I exclaimed. "You could not possibly have managed better, Mr. Mapleson, and I am infinitely obliged to you. Have you made any other discoveries?"

"No," was the reply. "I spent the best part of to-day at Southampton, prowling about, and asking questions here and there of the people who supplied the *Olga* with stores; but the yacht's crew appear to have been very reticent, or else the comtesse was cautious enough to content herself with giving them instructions only, without condescending to explain her intentions. It is clear enough to me, however, that the whole precious plot was carefully planned some time ago, and every preparation made for its execution with the most deliberate care. There remains only one more item of information to communicate to you, and that was discovered by Purkiss, who, in looking through the columns of one of the shipping papers to-day, saw— But you had better inform Mr. Berrington yourself, captain."

Upon this I turned to Purkiss, who at once drew the paper—ready folded open at the proper place—from his pocket, and, carefully pointing out the paragraph with his finger, handed it to me. The paragraph was headed "Report of Union Co.'s Royal Mail S.S. *Tartar*," and

gave the usual terse description of the ship's voyage and the various craft spoken. One of these latter was strongly underlined in pencil, and read as follows: "On Friday, August 31st, at 10.30 a.m., in lat. 41° 20′ N., long. 12° 31′ W., passed a large topsail schooner yacht, painted black, with gold stripe, flying Russian colours, and steering S.W."

"The *Olga*, for a million!" exclaimed I. "Let us go below and have a look at the chart."

We descended to the chart-room, roused out the chart of the Atlantic Ocean, and laid down upon it the position given, marking it "*Olga* (?) at 10.30 a.m. on August 31st." Then I took the compasses and carefully measured the distance along the course we supposed the vessel to have taken; when, upon the assumption that she had then been out from Gravesend one hundred and seventy hours, a very simple calculation showed us that her speed throughout had averaged barely seven knots.

"And a rattlin' good rate of sailin' I calls it, too, Mr. Berrington," observed Purkiss. "For you must remember, sir, that, once fairly at sea, these here Rooshians wouldn't be in no particular hurry. The countess wouldn't never dream of bein' chased, accordin' to Mr. Mapleson's thinkin' here, he bein' of opinion that she'd reckon upon the colonel bamboozlin' of you until you'd completely give your pore young lady up for lost. And then, again, it ain't to be supposed as the countess—bein' a woman, and likin' to have everything comfortable and easy about her

—'d be in favour of carryin' on and drivin' the wessel, and havin' her layin' over so's you couldn't stand on deck without holdin' on. So it's to be supposed as they'll be takin' things pretty easy aboard of that there *Holger*. Now, sir, if you'll just cast your eye upon the chart here, you'll see as the Rooshian was steerin' a compass course that 'd run him slap aboard of Madeira; and, if you thinks well of the plan, sir, it might be worth our while to take a look into Funchal Roads for an hour or two, just to see if we can hear anything of the craft."

"By all means," said I. "I shall aim to cross the Line on the meridian of thirty degrees, our course to which point lies so close to Madeira that to touch there will take us nothing out of our way, so we will call there. We must lose no possible opportunity of getting news of the *Olga* on our way; for we must remember that, after all, we know absolutely nothing of her destination except by assumption. And now, as to going to sea, Purkiss, when can we start?"

"This very minute, if you likes, sir," was the reply. "Leastways, we could if there was e'er a breath of wind, which there ain't. But everything and everybody's aboard, and it's only for you to say the word."

"Good!" said I. "Then we will be off at once. There was a tug lying up the harbour, with steam up, when I landed from the Southampton boat just now. You will take Mr. Mapleson ashore in the launch, Purkiss, and having landed him, you will find the tug and arrange with

them, if possible, to tow us to, say, ten miles south-west of the Needles lighthouse. If they cannot undertake the job, we must see what the launch can do for us; for go to sea to-night I will. We have lost too much time already, and must carry on night and day to make up for it. Now, Mr. Mapleson, if you will step down into the saloon with me, we can very soon transact what business remains to be done between us, and you will be able to get back to Southampton in good time for the last train to town."

CHAPTER V

THE CHASE IS BEGUN

TEN minutes later, the launch was once more ripping up the glassy waters of the Solent, on her way to Cowes, with Mapleson and Purkiss in the stern-sheets, while all hands were on deck, under the direction of the mate, heaving short upon the cable, hoisting in the boats, and generally getting ready for a start. The sun had by this time sunk beneath the horizon, and the twilight was imperceptibly spreading its veil of mystery over earth and sea. A bank of cloud away to the westward, that had somewhat earlier attracted my attention by its gorgeous colouring, still hung in the same position, very little altered in shape, but was now a mass of tender dove-grey colour against the pale primrose of the sky, with only a faint, lingering flush of delicate rosy pink clinging here and there to its skirts, which was dying out even as one looked at it. The water was like a sheet of polished glass, reflecting so faithfully the hues of the sky and the sharp outlines of the purple landscape, that it was impossible to tell, except by its shape, where any given object and its

reflection met each other. Two or three yachts, evidently anxious to reach their berths before nightfall, were in tow of their boats; but the ebb-tide had just begun to make to the westward, and those craft that it would not help upon their homeward way had for the most part brought up, and lay with their head-sails hauled down, waiting for a breeze. On board the anchored craft all round about us the riding lamps were twinkling palely in the light that was still strong upon the water; while ashore the lights were beginning to spark out here and there from the windows of the houses, as well as from the long rows of gas lamps upon the esplanade and in the streets. So still was the air that sounds of all kinds were extraordinarily distinct, even the very words that were spoken on board some of the neighbouring craft being intelligible to me, in the brief intervals of silence on board the *Evangeline*, as I stood aft near the wheel; while the strumming of a banjo on board one of the more distant vessels, the notes of a concertina from another, the rattle of vehicles on shore, the cries of a street hawker, the shouts of children at play, the barking of dogs, the tinkling of a piano, and even the beat of a steamer's paddles on the passage across from Portsmouth to Ryde, were startlingly audible, especially when, after a time, having hove short, the clank of our windlass pawls ceased, and all being ready for the expected tug, the men knocked off work for the moment, and went below.

A gleam of radiance from the saloon skylight presently

indicated that the stewards were lighting up below, and shortly afterwards the chief steward came on deck to inform me that dinner was served. As I had been altogether too busy throughout the day to think of eating since breakfast, I was tolerably hungry, and consequently lost no time in obeying the summons. About a quarter of an hour afterwards there was a slight stir on deck, and presently I heard Purkiss's voice giving orders to blow out the launch's boiler and hoist her up to the davits, also to see all clear for passing the towing hawser to the tug, and to stand by to trip the anchor; and then the old boy came below to inform me of the success of his mission, and that the tug would be alongside in a few minutes. He also informed me that as he was coming out of the harbour, after arranging about the towage, he had been hailed by somebody on the landing-stage, and going alongside to see what was the matter, he found it was Mapleson again, who had handed him a copy of an evening paper to bring off to me, with a message that I was to look at the latest telegrams of shipping news. I did so, and was delighted to find that the *Olga* was gazetted as having called at Madeira on the previous day, arriving at 10.50 a.m., and leaving again, "bound south," at 5.35 p.m. This was exceedingly satisfactory, in so far as that we now had positive intelligence of the whereabouts of the yacht only a little more than twenty-four hours previously. While Purkiss and I were still talking over this matter, the beat of approaching paddles

was heard, and presently the tug ranged up alongside, and I heard her skipper asking if we were ready to trip, upon which Purkiss went on deck again and gave some orders, the boatswain's pipe sounded, and the windlass pawls began to clank again. Then came the call, "Anchor's aweigh, sir!" from forward, and Purkiss's answering order to "Rouse it up smartly, and stow it!" The beat of paddles sounded ahead through the clanking of the windlass; and when, shortly afterward, the latter sound ceased, I became conscious of a soft seething along the ship's side, heard through the open ports, that told me we were moving through the water. "Thank God," murmured I, "we are off at last!" and there and then I drank a bumper to the success of the voyage.

When at length I went on deck, with a lighted cigar between my teeth, we were off Hampstead Point, with the lights of Yarmouth twinkling brightly over the port bow against the dark background of the hills beyond, and Hurst Castle, with its light blazing like a meteor from its stumpy tower, almost straight ahead, showing up, black as ink, and clean-cut as a cameo, against the pallid sky. The tug was pulling us along bravely, and the rapid rate at which we were sweeping past the various objects on shore showed that the ebb-tide was already running strong and adding a good two knots to our speed over the ground. The atmosphere was still breathless, although the pace at which we were moving created quite a fresh draught along the decks; but there was a look of

haze away down in the south-west that promised a breeze ere long, and though if it came from that quarter it would be dead ahead, my state of impatience was such that even a gale of wind in our teeth would have been more welcome to me than the stark calm that then prevailed. An hour later saw us abreast of the Needles lighthouse, and we had scarcely brought the beacon well over our quarter, when a catspaw or two came stealing along the glassy surface ahead of us, ruffling it here and there into patches of evanescent darkness; and then came the breeze itself, a light air from the south-west, cool and damp, with a promise of more weight in it by and by, when the moon should rise. Everything was very quiet now on board the yacht, for the anchor had been stowed long before, and the sail-covers taken off and rolled up, preparatory to making sail; the watch had been set, and the starboard watch was below—turned in, most probably—the *Evangeline* carrying a crew numerous enough to admit of her being worked under ordinary circumstances by the watch on duty. A few figures showed dimly in the darkness about the forecastle-head, but when they moved it was with noiseless feet, and as there was no work doing there was no calling of orders. The only sounds that met the ear were the monotonous beat of the tug's paddles ahead, the gentle seething of water past the yacht's bends, and a low, sighing murmur aloft of the slowly gathering breeze sweeping through the taut rigging. Purkiss, judging, perhaps, from my abstraction that I was not in a talking

mood, had planted himself near the binnacle, into which I could see his mahogany visage, lighted by the radiance of the lamps, peering contemplatively whenever I chanced to glance that way.

By and by the moon, in her third quarter, came stealing up, red as incandescent iron, out of the velvety darkness of the south-east, and shortly afterwards the tug hailed to say that she was going to cast off our tow-line, upon which the yacht awoke to life once more; Purkiss hailing the watch to man the peak and throat halliards of the mainsail, cast off and overhaul the sheet, top up the boom, cast loose the jibs, let go their down-hauls and hoist away, and, generally, to make sail upon the ship. The tug held on until she saw that our main-sail and jibs were set, then she eased her engines, cast off our tow-line, and hailed us to haul it in, and went ahead again at full speed, porting her helm, and sweeping round in a wide circle on her way back to Cowes. As for us, we starboarded our helm and went off to the south-ward, taking the tide on our lee beam so as to get all the benefit that we could out of it. The crew were a picked lot to start with, and Purkiss had already worked them into splendid fettle; it was not long, therefore, ere the *Evangeline* was sneaking away across the Channel toward the French coast, under every rag that would draw, and with almost upright masts,—so light still was the south-westerly air,—stealing through it at the rate of a good five knots by the log.

"Well, Mr. Berrington, sir, so we're off at last," remarked Purkiss, as he joined me, after going the round of the deck to satisfy himself that everything was set and drawing to the utmost advantage.

"Yes," I assented, "and I am heartily thankful that we are. We shall make a few miles during the night, if the breeze holds, as I think it will. And every mile is of vital importance to us now, under the circumstances, so I hope you will understand, Purkiss,—and will give Rogers to understand,—that the schooner is to be driven, night and day, to the extreme limit of safety, but not, of course, in such a reckless fashion as to endanger the spars; crippling the ship will not aid the object I have in view, but, short of that, you must get every inch you can out of her."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the old fellow encouragingly; "you may trust us aboard here to do our level best for you. I knows all about it, sir, and I'm sure I feels for you, —such a sweet, kind lady as she was, too. Yes, I knows all about it, partly from what I've read in the noospapers, partly from what I've guessed by the workin' of that there Mr. Mapleson, and partly by what he've been obliged to tell me. But don't you worry, Mr. Berrington; it's a longish stretch from here to Magellan, and the *Holger* has only got nine days' start of us, after all, accordin' to my reckonin',—supposin' she was off hereabouts a week come last Saturday, about this time,—and who's to say as she won't lose every minute of it afore she crosses the Line?

Then we knows that the Rooshians is a-takin' of it easy, whereas we're agoin' after 'em at a racin' pace; and I'm ready to bet that any time when we've got wind enough to put us along at anything above ten knots we'll be overhaulin' that hooker at the rate of not less than a knot and a half in the hour. Then look at the difference in the two wessels theirselves, Mr. Berrington. Why, dash my ugly old wig, sir, if you'll put me alongside of that there *Holger* in *any* weather—blow high, blow low—I'll give her our to'garns'l and a beatin'! or else I'll *h*eat her, crew and all!"

"Have you ever seen her under canvas, then, Purkiss, that you speak so confidently?" I asked.

"Well, I *have*, sir, certainly," answered he. "But it isn't so much by what I've seen her doin' under sail, as the looks of her, that I judges. I see'd her high and dry on Marvin's slip away back about a couple of months ago, and, Lord bless you, sir, the shape of her ain't to compare with this here beauty of ours. She's perhaps a foot or two longer than we are, and not near so beamy, yet to my taste her lines ain't to be spoke of the same day that ours be, and accordin' to my fancy she's a good deal too fat in the bilge to make a sailer. We'd run her under water altogether in heavy weather, sir, you mark my words, Mr. Berrington."

"Well, I sincerely hope your words will come true Purkiss," said I. "There seems to be a little more weight in the breeze, surely; and do you mark the swell

coming up from the south-west? How's her head, there?"

"Sou'-sou'-west, sir," answered the helmsman.

"We will hold on upon this tack until the tide turns, Purkiss," said I, "and that will be, out here where we are heading for, about two bells in the middle watch. Tell Rogers that when that time arrives he is to go about,—always provided, of course, that the wind hangs in the same quarter,—and we will show our stem to the flood."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Purkiss, walking over to leeward and glancing at the water, then at the sky over the weather bow. "The bonnie boat is awakin' up, sir; she's going every inch of six now, Mr. Berrington; and just look at her—why, she's hardly heelin' half a strake to it. Tell you what, sir: this here schooner is agoin' to turn out a flyer; you mark my words, sir. We saw what she could do in a moderate sailin' breeze t'other day, and now look at her in this light air; why, she's sneakin' through it like a regular-built racer. And we're agoin' to have more wind afore long; d'ye note that thickenin' of the sky down there to the south'ard and west'ard? We'll be reelin' off our nine knots afore we're two hours older, Mr. Berrington, or I'm a Dutchman, sir—which I ain't, by a long chalk!"

Purkiss was right. The clear, transparent look of the atmosphere away ahead, and from thence round to well abaft the weather beam, had given place to an appearance of thickness, as though a bank of thin smoke were forming

along the horizon, through which the stars were winking dimly, while close to the water's edge they had vanished altogether. The swell was increasing perceptibly, and the yacht was already acknowledging its influence in the short, jerky, curtseying motion of her mastheads among the stars. The small waves that came running to our weather bow began to curl over and break, now and then, into miniature crests of froth; and at intervals a moaning sigh went floating past us, as though some unquiet spirit were abroad upon the wings of the night. The hum of the wind in the rigging took a weirder note; small patches of gossamer scud appeared in the heavens, here and there, sailing solemnly athwart the moon; and from time to time a stronger puff of dank, heavy air would meet the yacht and bring a small straining sound out of the spars as she slightly bent to it, and sent a larger wave leaping and sparkling and buzzing and flashing away from her lee bow into the quivering wake of silver that lay under the moon. Each of these puffs meant a freshening of the breeze, for they were not evanescent; they marked a distinct increase in the force of the wind, and as they came at frequent intervals, by the time that eight bells had struck and the watch had been relieved, we had the *Evangeline* sweeping buoyantly along at an eight-knot pace, with her dancing deck gently sloping away under foot, and the great spaces of her canvas resonant and her rigging vocal with the music of the wind. I remained on deck until two bells in the middle

watch, when we tacked ship and stood away down Channel, heading west-nor'-west by compass,—at which time we were travelling the nine knots prophesied by Purkiss,—when, feeling tired with my long day, and rendered drowsy by the pouring of the strong salt breeze, I went below, and turned in.

I was awakened at half-past seven o'clock next morning by Mitchell's entrance into my cabin to inform me that my bath was ready, and upon my asking him whether he knew whereabouts we were, he stated that he had been instructed by Captain Purkiss to mention, with his compliments, that we were stretching in toward Dartmouth Harbour, with the land about eleven miles distant. I accordingly sprang out of my cot, and at once became aware of the fact that the schooner was laying over—probably to her covering-board—on the port tack, under the influence of a strong breeze; and from the liveliness of her motion I conjectured that there was a moderately high sea running. A glance at the tell-tale hanging in the small skylight of my cabin told me that we were heading west-by-north, having come up a point during the night; and a peep through the scuttles to windward showed a pallid sky overspread with horizontal layers of soft, smoky grey cloud, white-edged and windy-looking, with darker patches here and there, scudding swiftly along with a rain squall in their skirts. The view to leeward revealed an expanse of dirty greenish opaque water, its surface wrinkled by the sweep

of a strong breeze, and running in long froth-crested, yeasty seas, with the smooth surge from the yacht's lee bow roaring and hissing diagonally into them. The dizzy way in which the air-bells and gouts of yellowish foam went glancing past the port showed that the schooner had found her heels at last, and was plunging along at a great pace.

I hurried away to the bathroom, and while I was in it heard Purkiss's voice somewhere overhead giving the order "Ready about!" A minute later, the yacht was in stays, pitching pretty heavily, with a tremendous slatting of canvas and a quivering of her whole frame as she came head to wind; but she tacked like a little boat—her sails were no sooner a-shiver than they were full again, and ere I could scramble out of my bath we were thrashing away toward the French coast once more, on the starboard tack.

When, shortly afterwards, I went on deck, the Start was broad abeam, bearing west-north-west by compass, and distant about ten miles. The weather, as viewed from the deck, wore a decidedly more cheerful aspect than it had presented through the circumscribed openings of the ports below. There were little patches of pale, windy blue sky showing here and there through the cloud masses, especially to windward; and the sun—visible as a shapeless luminous blot broad on the lee beam—looked as though he were manfully struggling to break through the curtain of vapour and give us a fine day. The sea

was running in long, regular, yeasty ridges, with enough swell to hide the horizon occasionally when we sank into the trough of it; and the yacht was plunging along under everything we could show to it, to her royal, and square-headed gaff-topsail, in true racing style, with her lee scuppers buried, and with an eager, breathless, bounding motion, and a storming of wind in the hollows of her straining canvas, and a roar of foaming water under her lee bow, that it was an ecstasy to see and feel and hear.

Purkiss was on deck, evidently waiting to see me, although he had been relieved by the mate some quarter of an hour before; and as I emerged from the companion-way, with one glance aloft and another to windward, he approached and said—

"Good-morning, Mr. Berrington! I hope I sees you well, sir? A fine sailing breeze this, sir, for them that knows how to make a good use of it; and a most wonderful passage we've made, so far. There's the Start, sir, so close to us that if we'd held on for another hour without heavin' about we should have plumped ashore upon it, and only twelve hours ago we was inside the Wight. Why, steam couldn't have done better, Mr. Berrington! Ah, you was right to come out last night, sir. Where's your *Holger now*, sir? Have she done such a night's work as we have? I'll bet my boots she haven't."

"What are we doing now, Purkiss?" asked I, glancing over the lee rail at the ridge of foam that, a fathom

from the vessel's side, went swirling away astern at a speed that made one giddy to look at.

"We're doin' a clean twelve, sir, by the log, and have been doin' it ever since four bells in the middle watch. D'ye see that chap there, Mr. Berrington?" pointing to a barque under main-topgallantsail, hull-down, broad on our lee quarter. "Well, sir, he was hull-down straight ahead when I came on deck at four o'clock, and now see where he's settled to."

The Channel was wonderfully bare of craft, this barque being the only vessel in sight, excepting a fleet of some thirty trawlers that, spread out along the horizon ahead of us in a line about two miles long, were plying their trawls under close-reefed mainsails and storm-jibs—of the size of half a pocket-handkerchief—with the sheets to windward. Wonderfully picturesque did these fishing craft look as they rolled and plunged in the lumpy sea, with the sunlight glancing off their wet black sides and painting their tanned sails a deep, rich, ruddy brown, that contrasted admirably with the yellowish-green of the froth-crested surges. Despite their violent motion, they were riding as buoyantly as corks, and with perfectly dry decks; yet the few hands that showed on board them—in many cases only the man or boy who tended the tiller—were clad in oilskin overalls and sou'-westers. And wonderfully phlegmatic, too, were those fishermen. The *Evangeline* must have presented a noble and inspiriting picture as we went storming and plunging through their

fleet, yet very few of them condescended to glance at us, and only one—a burly old grey-whiskered Triton, whose craft we passed to leeward within biscuit-toss—honoured us with a wave of the hand.

As we cleared the last of the trawlers, the steward came on deck and summoned me to breakfast, and when, at the conclusion of the meal, I emerged once more from the cabin, I was gratified to find that the ship had come up a point nearer to her course, while the sky away to the west and north-west was clearing fast of cloud, with a hard, bright, windy look about the horizon that seemed to promise a veering of the wind more out from that quarter. A steamer and four sailing ships were in sight to windward; the former, broad upon our weather bow, being an immensely long, four-masted, two-funneled affair,—without a rag of canvas set, although she had a dead fair wind following her,—steering a course that threatened to bring her close aboard of us. The wind had freshened a trifle during the time that I had been below, while the swell that now came sweeping to us out from the west-south-west carried something more than a hint of the broad Atlantic in the weight of it, and we were thundering along with our lee channels buried deep and the water foaming to our figurehead at every headlong plunge, with our weather rigging taut as harpstrings and the breeze piping a whole orchestra of sea music through it, our topmasts whipping and buckling like fishing-rods to the flying leaps of the hull from surge to surge, and a

roar as of a hurricane resounding in the hollows of our straining canvas; yet that ponderous, stately iron fabric swam along as steadily as though she had been sliding upon ice. As she swept rapidly down toward us, with a coil of white foam heaping and boiling about her bows, she assumed the dimensions of an island, her black hull towering high above the horizon line, and the people clustering about her decks and bridges showing small as pigmies in comparison with her bulk, while the whiffs of the vanes above her trucks appeared to be fluttering among the clouds.

As I stood looking at her through my binoculars and endeavouring to decipher the name that appeared in brazen letters—dull and darkened by the washing of the brine—upon her cliff-like bows, Rogers the mate, who then had charge of the deck, came fidgeting to my side with the question—

"D'ye think, sir, that chap means to shift his hellum? If he don't, he'll be over us, as sure as heggs is heggs!"

"Shift his helm? Why, of course he will," said I. "The rule of the road is simple enough, and well enough understood by this time, surely. Being a steamer, he gives way to us. And even were he a sailing ship he would have to do so in the present instance, since he is before the wind while we are close-hauled on the starboard tack."

"He don't seem to be going to do it, though, sir, do he?" remarked Rogers apprehensively. "By the living

jingo he'll be over us in another minute!" he continued, in sudden panic. "What shall we do, sir?"

The steamer was now within a cable's length of us, coming on at full speed as steadily as though we were invisible, and steering a course that must inevitably cut us in two unless something were done. We, too, had held on, keeping our luff, in accordance with the rules of the road, and expecting every moment to see her sheering out of our way; but the time was now gone by for that, her close proximity to us and her enormous length were such that she could not now avoid us; so, with a sea blessing upon her skipper's stupidity, I ordered the helm down, and roared out to the watch to "ready about!" that now being the only remaining way of escape for us. As the men sprang to their stations and the yacht flew up into the wind, trembling from keel to truck with the furious shivering of her canvas, hang me if the fools on board that steamer didn't starboard their helm, and there were the two craft swinging stem-on to each other, and lessening the space between them at a combined speed of something like twenty-five to thirty miles an hour! For an instant the case looked so utterly desperate that I would not have given a brass farthing for the yacht and everything on board her; but even as the thought passed through my mind, I sprang to the wheel, and shouting to the helmsman to put it hard up, seized the spokes and sent it spinning round at lightning speed. Notwithstanding that the yacht was plunging her bows under at

the moment, she still had good way on, and, luckily, being a nimble vessel and very sensitive to her helm, she at once began to pay off again, her canvas filled, and she drew out from under the shadow of that floating mountain of iron unhurt, but with so little to spare that the extremity of our mainboom actually went rasping along the steamer's starboard bow, scoring a long line in the black paint, so that I was obliged to let run the sheet to save the spar. And as I looked up the lofty side of the vessel to the bridge, my eye met that of a grinning baboon of a fellow tricked out in a travesty of a naval uniform, who instantly took off his cap and bowed to me with amazing politeness and urbanity! Needless to say, the craft was *not* British.

That same night the wind hauled around sufficiently to allow us to set our starboard studding-sails, piping up so freshly at the same time that, with everything set that would draw, the yacht had as much as she could stagger under. Nothing, however, of interest occurred until the morning of Sunday,—our sixth day out,—when we made the high land of Madeira at daybreak. Then the wind fell light, remaining so all that night and through the next day, delaying us to such an extent that it was not until close upon sunset on Monday that we made the Peak of Teneriffe. The weather continued fine and the wind light all through Monday and Tuesday, when, toward evening, we had a shift of wind, the breeze hauling round on our larboard quarter and necessitating a jibe

and the changing over of the studding-sails from the starboard to the port side. Soon afterwards the wind indicated a disposition to freshen; and when I went on deck on Wednesday morning it had become certain that we had caught the north-east Trades, while the aspect of the sky was such as led me to hope for a freshening breeze and a quick run to the Equator.

CHAPTER VI

WE PICK UP A MAN

THE promise of more wind was so far verified that by noon our speed had risen to twelve knots, the wind being very nearly dead aft, with only just sufficient inclination toward our port quarter to keep the mainboom over the starboard rail, where we carried it guyed taut against the rigging and well topped up, with an immense ballon gaff-topsail over the mainsail, and our whole flight of studding-sails straining at the larboard yardarms. Our jibs, staysails, and boom-foresail, however, were useless to us, so they were hauled down and stowed. The weather was typical Trades weather: a high, clear blue sky overhead, across which countless squadrons of steam-like Trade-cloud swept continuously, flecking the brilliant sapphire of the sea with broad, fleeting bands and patches of deep violet shadow and dazzling sunshine; a moderate swell pouring up from the north-east and overrun by small waves breaking into little crests of creamy, sparkling foam, over which the yacht slid in long,

stooping curtseys to the hollows, and steady upheavals of her stern with swift forward rushes to the lifting of the seas, while the flying-fish flashed in shoals from under her keen stem and went sparking away to port or starboard in long skimming flights, like animated jewels. The sea was singularly bare of craft; but we passed two outward-bounders within signalling distance, and inquired of them whether they had seen anything of a schooner answering to the description of the *Olga*, the answer in each case being "No." At midnight on Friday the 14th of September, we sighted and passed Fogo,—one of the Cape Verd group,—distant six miles; and from that time nothing worthy of mention occurred until four o'clock on the morning of the eighteenth, when the wind began to soften rapidly, and by eight o'clock we had run into a stark, glassy calm, being at that time ninety miles from the Equator. This was horribly provoking, for it in all probability portended a long delay for us; while I had known cases of ships being actually carried to the southward of the Line before losing the north-east Trade winds, and I had crossed the Equator myself and run from the north-east into the south-east Trades without meeting a calm belt at all, the wind simply hauling round gradually. That, however, was an unusual experience, such as a man might only meet with perhaps once in a lifetime; but it was exasperating enough to think that it was one that the *Olga* might possibly have met with, and that she might be foaming away to the impulse of the south-east Trades

while we were hung up ninety miles on the wrong side of the Equator, without steerage-way.

Poor Purkiss was horribly crestfallen, the more so that there was no sign whatever of the *Olga*, or indeed of a craft of any description, in sight—this being a clear indication that the calm in that spot was only of the most recent description, and was steadily forcing its way north; had it not been so, we should assuredly have fallen in with other craft in the same plight as ourselves.

"This is a *bad* job, Mr. Berrington, sir," he remarked to me, as I emerged from the companion on to the white deck that was already growing hot to the feet under the unclouded beams of the morning sun. "Look at it, sir; why, you can't make out the horizon, the water's that smooth and dazzlin' under the sun; and as for swell, why, the little that we brought along with us is fast dyin' down, and no sign of any comin' from anywheres else. I've been aloft as far as the royal-yard and had a look round; but there's nothin' in sight—not so much as the fin of a shark—and not a sign of a cloud anywheres. I never see'd such weather as this here on the Line, and I've crossed it eight times, too."

"Well," said I, "we can't help it, Purkiss; and I wouldn't mind so much if we could be sure that the *Olga* had met with the same weather, but I am afraid she has not. However, I do not feel disposed to lie here waiting for a wind, we must go and look for one; so get steam in the launch—she must tow us until we can do better—and

while that is doing, let the watch get in the studding-sails, rig in the booms, and stow all the square canvas."

"Well, well!" ejaculated the old fellow, in deep chagrin; "to think that I should ha' had that there launch a-starin' at me all this time without gettin' the idee into my head that she could do a bit of towin' for us! You see, Mr. Berrington," he added apologetically, "I've never been shipmates with a steam launch before, and that, I s'pose, is why I didn't think of it. D'ye know, sir, whether the *Holger* carries a launch?"

"She carries a small steam pinnace that, in weather like this, might make shift to drag the vessel along at the rate of perhaps a knot and a half in the hour, I believe," said I; "but I am not aware that she has anything like that boat of ours. And if she had, I do not suppose it would occur to her people to use it; they probably do not consider their errand so extraordinarily urgent as that would amount to. If they thought of using their pinnace at all, I suspect it would only be to drag their vessel out of visiting distance from others; and, for aught we know, the craft may be away down there a few miles below the horizon, lying as motionless as ourselves, with awnings spread fore and aft, and everybody waiting patiently for a breeze to come and move them."

"I pray the Lord that they may be!" piously ejaculated the old fellow, as he turned away and walked forward to see how matters were progressing there.

When I returned to the deck after breakfast, the

launch, with an awning spread, was ahead, towing the *Evangeline* along over the oil-smooth surface of the water at a speed of close upon four knots. The square canvas was closely furled to the yards, which were braced fore and aft; while all other canvas, except the huge mainsail, had been hauled snugly down, that there might be as little resistance as possible offered to our passage through the stagnant air. The weather was precisely as it had been at daybreak: a cloudless sky, that seemed to palpitate with the scorching heat, the colour a deep tropic blue everywhere except near the horizon, where it was colourless, and all round the sun, where it was a white, blinding dazzle. An awning had been spread abaft for the shelter of myself, the maid,—who now passed most of her time on deck, reading,—and the helmsman; and a small awning had also been rigged over the forecastle, under which the watch were as busy as the intense heat would permit upon sundry sea jobs. There was a small draught along the deck, due to our passage through the air, that somewhat mitigated the broiling effect of the sun's almost vertical rays; yet the mitigation was but slight, and I was therefore somewhat surprised to see some of the men clustering in the eyes of the schooner, in the fullest of the blaze; while Rogers, who had charge of the deck, was in the fore-crosstrees, working away upon something ahead with the ship's telescope.

"Fore-crosstrees, there, is there anything in sight?" I hailed.

Rogers looked down and caught sight of me standing just within the shadow of the fore-leach of the awning.

"Yes, sir," he answered; "and it looks most uncommonly like a man swimming."

"A man swimming? Nonsense!" I ejaculated. "Is it visible from the deck?"

"Yes, sir," came the reply in a sort of chorus from the men on the forecastle, who upon hearing my hail—or perhaps upon a hint from their fellows—had quietly resumed their work.

I shouted through the skylight to one of the stewards to bring my binoculars on deck, and upon receiving them, went forward.

"Where away is the object?" I inquired of the men generally, as they acknowledged my presence among them by a respectful sea scrape of the left leg and a flourish of their hands to their foreheads.

"Right ahead, sir," answered one of them, dropping his work to point. "If you'll stand here, sir," stationing himself at the starboard windlass bitt, "you'll see it just clear of the launch's funnel."

I brought the glass to bear upon the small object that the man pointed out, but could make nothing of it, owing to the sinuous, corkscrew-like movement of it in the strongly rarefied air. While I watched, however, I observed a sudden elongation of the blotch—for it was nothing else—that was curiously suggestive of a waving movement, and at the same instant Rogers shouted down:—

"See that, sir? I'm blest if I don't believe it *is* a man, and he's waving to us!"

"I can make nothing of it down here," I answered. "How does it show from where you are?"

"Like a man, sir, swimmin'; but he's too far off yet for me to be sure of him."

My curiosity was aroused. Of course it could *not* be a man, because there was no ship in sight, and he could scarcely have dropped from the clouds; still, the movement I had observed suggested that it must be something alive, and, despite the scorching heat, I determined to make an excursion as far as the crosstrees, and satisfy myself if I could as to its identity.

In a few seconds I was in the crosstrees, on the opposite side of the masthead to the mate, and at this height the object showed as being about three miles distant, and was perfectly distinct on the glass-like surface of the water. I soon had the binoculars bearing upon it, and made it out as a small dark speck; and it seemed to be in motion, too, in our direction, for there was a faint blue discoloration of the water beyond it, spreading out like a short wake. As I continued to ogle it curiously, the waving movement which I had before noticed was repeated, and this time it bore so close a resemblance to and suggestion of the flourish of an arm in the air that I was startled.

"By Jove, Rogers," I exclaimed, "I am half inclined to your opinion that it really *is* a man, after all. Launch ahoy!"

"Hillo!" came the answer floating back to us.

"Do you see that object floating on the water ahead?"

"We fancies we can see something now and again out there, sir," answered the coxswain, who, with the engineer, seeing everybody staring over the bows, had been peering ahead under the sharp of their hands.

"Just let go the line, then, and run out to it," I called. "From here it looks very like a man overboard."

"Ay, ay, sir," came the answer, with a flourish of the hand; and in another moment the launch had cast off and was ripping through the smooth surface at her utmost speed.

This was the first time I had ever been aloft in the schooner, and though I was by no means unaccustomed to the peculiar sensation experienced under such circumstances, I do not think I had ever felt it so strongly before. It was not that I was at any very great height from the deck,—I had often been on the royal-yard of a taut frigate on the African coast away there beyond the eastern horizon, and therefore felt perfectly at ease where I was,—but the hull of the yacht below me looked so long and slim in proportion to the bulk of the masthead beside me and the topmast with its yards over my head, that the sensation produced was as of such extravagant topheaviness that the slightest movement on my part must inevitably result in the instant capsizal of the craft. This rather disagreeable feeling is, I believe, invariably experienced by those who go aloft for the first time; and

I have known cases wherein men have found it so impossible to shake it off—despite their reason and their knowledge of its absurdity—that they would rather do anything else than be compelled to go up the ratlines. I had overcome that feeling, however, long before, and was able to give my whole attention to what I saw below and around me. The yacht looked absurdly small, as I now viewed her; more, indeed, like an exquisitely-finished model than a ship that had penetrated to the heart of the Atlantic, and the impression was heightened by the presence of the guns that protruded their slim, polished muzzles through her bulwarks and were reflected in the mirror-like surface below. Her decks were of the dazzling whiteness of sand above high-water mark, and the stumpy shadows of her masts and rigging showed upon the planks like the clean, delicate pencillings of a brush dipped in violet ink. The brass-work gleamed in steady, unwinking flashings of white fire fore and aft the deck, and the shadows under the awnings were dark as those of a cave's interior. The masts appeared to spring from the decks slim as slender wands, and to swell upwards in a quickly increasing bulk, exciting an emotion of wonder that bases so delicate could support so ponderous a weight; while as for the mainsail, its broad cloths appeared voluminous enough to enwrap the entire hull a dozen times over. The water, as looked down upon from my viewpoint, was of a pure, deep, exquisite ultramarine tint all round close to the ship, the colour quickly losing

itself, however, in the whiteness of the calm that came curving to us on the almost imperceptible undulations of the swell; and so perfectly transparent and pellucid was it that an empty sardine tin, hove overboard by the steward, and which had struck the water in such a way as to fill and sink, remained visible for a full minute, winking whitely up through the blue until it grew too small to be any longer seen.

The launch, meanwhile, had drawn close up to the object, and presently I saw her slue broadside-on to us; she was turning; there was a stoppage for perhaps a minute, and then she contracted her length until she was stem-on and was heading back for us. I watched her for a minute or two, but was unable to see whether she had picked up anything, and the heat of the sun proving by this time unpleasantly powerful, I returned to the deck.

A quarter of an hour later the launch arrived alongside, and it was then found that she had actually picked up a man floating in a life-buoy, and the most astonishing part of the whole matter, perhaps, was that, although he had been in the water something like ten hours, he seemed to be not a halfpenny the worse. He was dressed in blue dungaree, was bare-footed, and wore a Scotch cap; and while the cap and the upper part of his jumper were perfectly dry, the rest of his clothes were also rapidly drying in the hot air and the ardent rays of the sun. I sent him into the forecastle to shift into other clothing

while his own were drying, and to get some breakfast; and after making himself comfortable, he came aft and told me his story.

There was nothing very startling in it, after all; nothing, perhaps, but what, excepting as to the finale, is happening in some part of the broad ocean every day.

It ran somewhat as follows:—

"You see, sir, it's this way. My name is Thomas Cole, and I belongs to the barque *Sea Belle* of London—signed on as A.B. for a v'yage from London to Valparaiso and back. We was twenty-six days out from the river yesterday. Everything went all right with us until yesterday, when, about five bells in the first watch, the wind breezed up strong and heavy all of a sudden, and *crack* goes the larboard fore-topmast stunsail-sheet, the sail startin' floggin' about in the breeze enough to take the boom out of her. Mr. Bussell—that's the mate, sir—sings out for a couple of hands to jump up on the fore-yard to secure the sail and bend the sheet afresh, and accordin'ly me and another man named Phil Corbett jumps aloft and lays out. When we got out as far as the yardarm, we found that we'd got a nasty job upon our hands; for the sheet had parted about three fathoms from the cringle, and was whippin' and lashin' about all over the place, and catchin' us some nasty whacks now and then about the head and face, and somehow we didn't seem noways able to get hold of it. At last I says to Corbett, says I, 'This here won't do at all, Phil,' I says; 'we *must* get hold of

the sail if we can;' and up I jumps upon the yardarm, and leanin' up again' the leach of the topsail, I reaches out to grab the stunsail. At last I gets hold of it with both hands, but I'd no sooner got it than I was whisked off the yard and flung for'ard into the sea. Corbett twigged what had happened directly, and afore I struck the water I heard him sing out, 'Man overboard!' I s'pose Mr. Bussell must have see'd me fall, too; for as I rose to the surface, just clear of the ship's quarter, with my face that way, I noticed the mate standin' on the gratin' abaft the wheel, with his arms up in the air as though he was heavin' somethin', and then down plumps a life-buoy close alongside of me, which I lays hold of and slips my head and arms through it. Then, as the barque goes slippin' away from me into the darkness, I hears the mate's voice singin' out; and presently there was more singin' out by the men, and a thrashin' and a thunderin' of loose canvas in the wind, by which I guessed that they was shortenin' sail to round-to and lower a boat. But, Lord bless you, sir, when I went overboard the barque was skimmin' along at a good ten knots, and afore they could get the canvas off of her she'd dwindled down to a mere blot the size of your hand; and when at last I saw, by the lengthenin' out of her against the stars, that she'd rounded-to, she was a good three mile away. Well, sir, when I saw how far off she was, I give myself up for lost, for I knowed that the chances of a boat pullin' so far to wind'ard to look for me wasn't worth considerin'; besides, there was a tidy bit of sea

runnin', and what with the men havin' to pull again' it, and the barque settlin' away down to leeward, the men 'd never fancy I was so far astarn as I was. Hows'ever I'd been paddlin' away for the ship as hard as I knowed how ever since I'd got into the buoy, and I kept it up; for it wasn't hard work, you know, sir, not like swimmin' without anythin' to bear you up; but do as I would, the barque kept dwindlin' and dwindlin', showin' that she was driftin' faster than I could make headway.

"Well, I s'pose I'd been overboard a good three-quarters of an hour, when, as I rose to the top of a sea, I catches sight of a small black speck broad away on my larboard bow that I felt sure was the boat, and I starts to head that way, keepin' about a couple of points to wind'ard of 'em, and at the same time I starts hailin' 'Boat ahoy!' every time that I got to the top of a sea. I didn't see the boat again for perhaps ten minutes, and when I did she was pretty near abeam of me, and dead to leeward, they havin' shifted their helm in the meantime. Away I goes after her again, still hailin'; but it were no good, sir. I saw her two or three times after that, first in one place and then in another, showin' that they was still lookin' out for me; but they never worked far enough to wind'ard to come within hail of me; and at last, when I was that hoarse that I couldn't shout above a whisper, I sees the barque square away again, and half an hour a'terwards I lost sight of her altogether. That was when I'd been overboard about three hours or thereabouts, though

perhaps it were not really so long as that, only it seemed so to me there in the water.

"Well, sir, when the barque went out o' sight I lost heart altogether for a bit, and felt like throwin' up my hands and goin' down; and I *should* ha' done it, too, I believe, if it hadn't been for the thoughts of the wife and youngsters at home. But when they come into my mind I says to myself, 'No,' says I, 'I'll hold all on as long as I can; I ain't dead yet, by a long ways,' I says, 'and I won't give up until I'm obliged to.' For you see, sir, I wasn't by no means uncomfortable after all; the water was warm, and the buoy floated me so high that it was only once in a while that a sea broke over me. What I was most afeard of was that some hungry shark would come along and nip me in two; but I had to take my chance of that, and there was some comfort in rememberin' that, though I'd been overboard a good three hours, none of 'em hadn't fallen in with me so far. Then, again, there was a fine breeze blowin', and I knowed that I was fair in the track of the outward-bound ships, so that a sail might come along any time and pick me up.

"By and by I noticed, hows'ever, that the breeze was finin' down a bit, and by the time that the sky began to brighten up in the east'ard there was scarcely wind enough to have blowed out a candle. This was dreadful disheartenin', to be sure; for I knowed that if it come to fall calm there was no chance of my bein' picked up, and I didn't like the look of the sky, it was too clear altogether

to suit my book. But presently up comes the sun, showin' above the horizon like a flame of melted gold, and a minute or two a'terwards I felt as though I could ha' jumped clear out of the water with joy when my eyes falls upon the white upper canvas of this here vessel, and, with a shout, away I starts paddlin' towards you. You seemed to be comin' straight on end for me, and I noticed that you was risin' middlin' fast, too, although it was stark calm with me by that time. But I hoped that you was bringin' down a little air of wind with you, and as soon as ever I could make out your jib-boom end I strikes out so as to get it dead in line with your foremast, in the hopes of bein' able to get close alongside by the time that you reached me. Then I saw you shortenin' sail and furlin' your square canvas, and I didn't know what to make of it at first; but by and by I concludes that you had lost the wind, and was just stowin' your canvas to take care of it, like. I'd already made out as you was a schooner, and when I see'd the smart way in which your canvas was clewed up and hauled down, all at once, man-o'-war fashion, 'Why, blow me,' says I, 'here's another yacht, and I stands a good chance of bein' picked up, because I've heard that they always keeps a hextry bright lookout aboard them craft.' And now that you was in sight I didn't so much mind your losin' the wind; for I says, 'They can't budge from there now, so long as this here calm lasts, and if it'll only hold till noon I'll be able to paddle alongside by that time, if no prowlin' shark don't fall in with me

afore that.' All this time, you'll understand, sir, I was givin' way as hard as I could, headin' your way; but it was tidyish slow work, owin' to the life-buoy. The next thing I notices was a little stream of thin smoke risin' in the air alongside of the schooner, and I couldn't understand that a bit, nor I couldn't understand it either when I see'd that you was drawin' nearer to me fast again, until I noticed the gleam of the sun on the launch's brass funnel, and then I understood the whole business in a jiffy; and seein' that you was keepin' dead on for me, I knowed that it was all right, and I knocked off paddlin' for a spell to rest myself, for I was gettin' to feel a bit tired. But while I was restin', keepin' my eyes on you all the while, what should I see, about a quarter of a mile off, but the fin of a bloomin' shark scullin' along between me and the schooner! It give me a most awful scare, I can tell you, sir; for I fully expected to see the fish bear up for me at any minute, and I took precious good care not to stir a *h*eyelid so long as he was in sight. Hows'ever, he kept all on as he was headin', to the south'ard and east'ard, and as soon as he was fairly out of sight I makes sail once more, stoppin' every now and again to wave my cap by way of a signal when I lifted on to the top of a swell, hopin' somebody aboard 'd catch sight of me. And by and by I sees first one hand and then another goin' up the fore-riggin' into the crosstrees and standin' there, and as there didn't seem to be no work for 'em to be doin' up there, I was in hopes that I'd been made out, so I pulls

foot all I knowed, and kept on wavin', and by and by I sees that the launch had cast off and was comin' foamin' down full speed toward me; and if ever a poor sailor-man was thankful to the Lord for all His mercies, I was then, sir. Ay, sir, and I'm deeply and everlastin'ly thankful and grateful to you, too, sir, for sendin' the little craft to pick me up, for we sighted another shark—or the same one—as we was runnin' down to the schooner, and the beast was headin' straight for the spot where I'd been picked up."

CHAPTER VII

NEWS OF THE *OLGA*

"A MOST interesting story, and very graphically told, Cole," said I. "I congratulate you heartily upon your escape from what threatened to be a terrible death, and am very glad that we happened to be at hand to rescue you from it. I hope you will make yourself at home so long as you may be obliged to remain in the yacht; and as for the lads for'ard, they are an excellent set of men, and will, I feel sure, make you heartily welcome to the forecastle. You will, however, be glad to get back to the *Sea Belle* once more, I have no doubt, and if this calm lasts, we shall probably pick her up somewhere ahead. And now I want to ask you a question or two. In telling me your story just now, you made use of the expression '*another* yacht.' Am I to understand from that that we are not the first yacht you have fallen in with lately?"

"Why, yes, sir," answered Cole, in some surprise, apparently, at my question; "we was overhauled and passed by a schooner yacht last Friday evenin', in the

first dog watch. That's what makes me say to myself this mornin', 'Here's *another* yacht,' because you see, sir, yachts ain't a kind of craft that you falls in with every day at sea, 'specially down here in these low latitoods. The sight of t'other chap was a bit of a surprise to all hands of us, so you may fancy I was astonished when I makes *you* out to be a yacht too."

"Quite so; I can easily understand that," said I. "Did you get a good enough sight of the other schooner to be able to describe her to me?" I continued. "I ask the question because I have some reason to believe that there is a schooner yacht called the *Olga* down hereaway, with some people of my acquaintance on board, and I should like to fall in with her if possible."

"I understands, sir, perfectly," answered the man. "Well, this here schooner was a craft of pretty much your own size, I should say, or maybe a trifle longer, and rigged just the same as your own vessel, sir. Only she was painted black, with a gold ribbon round her, and she carried four bright varnished boats in her davits. She passed us about a couple of mile to wind'ard, the wind bein' then on our port quarter, and she was bowlin' along under stunsails on the port side and everything else that would draw. We was goin' about nine then, and I reckon that she must have been travellin' through it at a good eleven. We showed her our ens'n and number; but she took no notice of 'em, and showed no colours in return, so I reckon that—as the skipper said—

for I was at the wheel at the time, and heard him—she must ha' been a furriner. And what made me think so all the more was that, although she was certainly a yacht, if one could judge by the beautiful hull of her, there was a lubberly look about the set of her canvas that no English skipper 'd have put up with for a minute."

"Thank you, Cole," said I. "From what you say, I rather fancy she must be the vessel I mean. Do you say it was on Friday evening last that she passed you?"

"Yes, sir, Friday evenin' last, doorin' the first dog watch, say about three bells."

I thanked the man again, and, dismissing him, sat musing upon the information he had given me. I had not a doubt that the vessel of which he spoke was the *Olga*. His description of her, such as it was, answered in every particular to that of the yacht of which I was in chase, and the spot where she was encountered tallied most accurately with what it should have been according to Purkiss's and my own calculations; for this was a Tuesday, and the unknown yacht had been sighted on the previous Friday—barely four days ago. According to that, we had gained on her fully as much as we hoped to do, and if the calm into which we had run had been of any great duration, we might even yet stand a chance of overhauling her on the Line, as Purkiss had predicted. For, after putting the man Cole on board the schooner, the launch had gone ahead again and resumed her towing job, and

the news that I had just heard determined me to keep her there, night and day, so long as the calm lasted.

Our sights at noon that day placed us eighty miles north of the Equator, a distance that might easily be covered during the ensuing twenty-four hours with the assistance of the launch; and as I reflected upon the fact that ships have been known to lie sweltering in these breathless latitudes for two or three weeks on end, without shifting their position by so much as a mile a day, my hopes of overtaking the *Olga* grew so sanguine as almost to merge into certainty. I told Purkiss what I had learned from the man Cole, and he, even more sanguine than myself, declared that we might heave the *Olga's* mastheads above the horizon at any moment, going even to the length of proposing that a hand should be stationed upon the royal-yard forthwith, and a lookout from thence permanently maintained, in order to reduce the risk of missing her by passing out of sight of her, either to port or to starboard. I thought that it was full early to adopt such a precaution as that, but assented to it nevertheless, and a hand was ordered aloft forthwith.

When I returned to the deck after luncheon, there was no change in the weather; the calm was as dead and breathless as it was possible to be, judging from the oily smoothness of the water—although a light draught of air fanned along our decks, with the motion of the vessel, and tempered the intensity of the heat under the awnings; and there was nothing in sight, either from the deck or

the royal-yard, save an occasional triangular black fin, now and then, shaped like the sail of an Arab dhow, gliding stealthily along, and raising a short thread-like ripple of blue upon the glassy surface. Meanwhile, the yacht was under bare poles, her fore and aft canvas having been hauled down and stowed some time before, principally to ease the jaws of the mainboom and to spare the sheet, and now the decks were entirely covered in, fore and aft, by an awning.

Seven bells in the afternoon watch had just been struck when the lookout aloft reported a sail right ahead, but too far off to determine her character; and at three bells in the first dog watch another sail was reported two points on the starboard bow. By this time the first sail reported had slued broadside-on to us, and the lookout shouted down the news that he now made her out to be a barque; upon hearing which, Cole stepped into the fore rigging and ascended to the royal-yard with the deliberate movement of the true merchant sailor, thinking it possible he might be able to identify the craft as the *Sea Belle*; and when he came down again he expressed his conviction that it was indeed that vessel, although we had not raised her sufficiently to enable him to make sure of her.

The sunset that evening was as fine and clear as any that I have ever seen; there was not a trace or suspicion of vapour in the whole dome of the visible sky, and, so far as appearances went, one might have been in a rainless

region, instead of within the area of almost continuous rainfall. The moon was in her first quarter that night, and so clear was the atmosphere that, although only half her disc was illuminated, I had no difficulty whatever in reading ordinary printed type by her light.

The craft first sighted by us, and afterwards discovered to be a barque, lay straight in line with our jib-boom end when we were heading our course, and by eight bells in the second dog watch we had approached her nearly enough to enable Cole to identify her, with the aid of the night-glass, as unmistakably the *Sea Belle*. By two bells in the first watch we were up abreast of her, upon which I ordered the launch to cast off and come alongside, and Cole and I jumping into her, we boarded the vessel. The astonishment of all hands on board her at again seeing in their midst, alive and well, the shipmate whom they had all given up as drowned or devoured by sharks nearly twenty-four hours previously, was amusing to witness; but it soon passed off,—for sailors see so many surprising and wonderful sights, and meet with so many astounding experiences in the pursuit of their calling, that their capacity for sustained astonishment soon becomes exhausted,—and before I left the ship again, half an hour later, the watch had settled down into a state of perfect tranquillity once more; and Cole, whose watch was then below, had retired to his bunk. The skipper of the *Sea Belle* proved to be a very gentlemanly and pleasant young fellow, and after he had

thanked me for the care I had taken of his man, I made a few inquiries of him respecting the yacht that had passed him, his answers to which left me in very little doubt that the vessel must indeed have been the *Olga*.

The moon set that night at half-past eleven o'clock; and by midnight it had fallen so dark, despite the clear starlight, that I determined to cease towing through the night, lest I should unknowingly pass and miss the *Olga* in the darkness; the launch was therefore hoisted to the davits, and we passed the night about equidistant between the *Sea Belle* and the second craft sighted—a full-rigged ship; the barque being hull-down to the northward of us, while the ship was some seven miles to the westward. I do not think that either of us shifted our position a quarter of a mile during the night, which remained as breathless as the day had been.

There was no indication of a change of weather at dawn of the succeeding day; the launch was therefore again lowered, and the tedious operation of towing resumed. I must admit that I was astonished at the weather we were now experiencing. I had been under the impression that my long spell of service on the West African coast had made me thoroughly familiar with every phase of Line weather; but although I had often lain for days together in close proximity to the Equator, sweltering in a breathless calm, and enveloped in an atmosphere saturated with heated fog, which shut out the heavens above us and circumscribed our horizon to a

circle of half-a-mile radius, this was the first occasion upon which I had witnessed so long a duration of perfectly calm, *clear* weather. Nothing could be more brilliant than the aspect of the day of which I am now writing. The sky of the zenith was of a deep, clear, pure, and inexpressibly beautiful blue, melting away by subtle gradations into a warm, tender, delicate, pearly grey, as it sank toward the horizon, without a trace of vapour in the whole spacious vault, from sea-line to sea-line; the water was like a vast sheet of the smoothest plate-glass, without a blur or wrinkle anywhere, save where a shark's fin occasionally showed above the surface, stealthily gliding along, and marking its movement by the wedge-shaped wake it left behind it, or the disturbance caused by the launch's and our own passage through the water, the small ripple raised by which went spreading away in a fine wire-like line of blue abeam of us and on either quarter, until it could be traced a mile away. As for swell, there was so little that for minutes together the yacht remained as steady as though she were on the stocks, when there would come a faint, scarcely perceptible heave—noticeable to the eye only, so gentle was it—that would stir her hull and impart a momentary oscillation to the chandelier, bracket lamps, and swinging trays in the saloon, to be succeeded by another period of immobility.

By nine o'clock that morning we had five vessels in sight from the royal-yard; and as the day wore on, we sighted others from time to time, showing that we were

approaching a considerable fleet. But, to my great disappointment, among them all there was nothing in the least resembling the *Olga*.

The sun's meridian altitude that day gave us a latitude of ten miles north of the Equator, and shortly after noon a cloud-bank in the south-western quarter, that had already been reported from aloft, began to show its upper edge above the horizon. By four bells in the afternoon watch we were up abreast of the most northerly craft of the fleet—a fine, handsome barquentine; but we passed her out of hailing distance, and although she showed us her ensign and number, the atmosphere was so utterly breathless that the flags hung up and down in folds as stiff and motionless as though the bunting had been sheet iron, rendering it next to impossible to decipher the signal; we therefore made no effort to ask her any questions by means of the flags, and I did not choose to attract undue attention by boarding her, as there were other craft ahead that would be just as likely as she to afford me information. At five bells we crossed the Line, according to our reckoning at noon, and by this time the cloud-bank had worked itself very nearly half-way to the zenith, showing itself as a vast veil of white mottled cloud with delicate, tender grey shadowings along the lower edges of the horizontal strata in which it was arranged, with small open spaces here and there through which could be seen the blue sky laced with streaks and curls of feathery cloud. This was as to the upper part of the bank;

nearer the horizon the cloud presented the precise appearance of the ribbed sand on a flat shore that is laid bare by the ebb-tide. From the heaving up of this bank in the south-western quarter, and the look of it generally, I concluded that we should get a breeze out from there before very many hours had passed over our heads; and as the afternoon wore on, and the bank continued to soar toward the zenith, the signs of a coming wind became by subtle mutations every hour more unmistakable.

A very fine four-masted ship had been gradually lifting her taunt spars and milk-white canvas above the horizon under our jib-boom end all the afternoon, and by two bells in the first dog watch we were up abreast of her, and not a cable's length distant. She was an exceedingly handsome vessel, built of iron, with an elliptical stern, full poop, raised forecastle, and a long deck-house of polished teak abaft the foremast—which was stepped a long way aft. Her lower masts, lower and topsail yards, and bowsprit were all of iron; she was very tauntly rigged, with immensely square yards, no studding-sail booms or irons; and she carried double topsails and topgallantsails, with flying kites up to moonsails above them, and staysails innumerable between her four masts. Her hull was painted grey, with a salmon-pink bottom to within about six inches above her load-line, black top-sides, gilt figurehead, gilt stripe along her sheer-strake, and a quantity of gilt flourishing around the large windows in her stern, under which appeared the name

Queen of the South, and the port of registry, *London*. An awning was spread over her exceedingly long poop, and under its shadow a number of men and women, attired mostly in white, were lounging in a variety of attitudes, all more or less powerfully suggesting the uttermost extremity of ennui. I thought it possible that the people on board this craft might be able to give me some intelligence of the *Olga*, so I called the launch alongside and boarded her.

One of the mates received me at the gangway and conducted me to the poop, at the break of which the skipper of the ship—a fine, handsome man of some five-and-thirty years of age, with a face ruddy by long exposure to the sun, curly auburn hair cut short, ruddy gold moustache, carefully trimmed beard of the same tint, and frank grey eyes—met me, raising his cap with a most courtly grace in acknowledgment of my salutation. I explained to him that I was bound south on a cruise to the Pacific, and that, having heard of a yacht somewhere ahead that I had reason to believe carried friends of mine, I had boarded him in the hope of obtaining news of the vessel; whereupon, learning that my business with him was not of a private nature, he insisted upon introducing me to his passengers, that I might take five-o'clock tea with them, which refreshment the stewards were just then handing round; and in a few minutes I found myself, with a cup of tea in my hand, and the skipper alongside me, the centre of a lively group of chatty, pleasant-

mannered people, who seemed to regard my visit almost as a godsend. In answer to my inquiries, I learned that they had been in company with a topsail schooner-rigged yacht answering to the description of the *Olga* during the greater part of the preceding Sunday, but they scarcely thought she could be the craft that I wished to fall in with, or indeed English at all, as she resolutely refused to show her colours, or to take any notice of the signals they made to her. The skipper informed me that the yacht had overhauled them early on Sunday morning, when, the breeze freshening somewhat with the rising of the sun, the *Queen of the South* had held her own with the schooner until about the middle of the afternoon watch. The wind then fell light, and the schooner drew ahead so fast that at sunset she had sunk below the horizon to her main-crosstrees, and was nowhere to be seen, even from aloft, next morning. I had no doubt whatever that this was the *Olga* again; and if so, we had gained another day upon her, for it was on a Wednesday afternoon that I boarded the *Queen of the South*. I received a most pressing invitation from the hospitable skipper and passengers of this fine ship to stay and dine with them; but I had noticed certain changes in the appearance of the cloud-bank within the last hour or two that led me to believe that a change of weather was impending, and I therefore preferred to return to my own ship without any unnecessary delay.

The *Evangeline* had drifted nearly a mile to the south-

ward of the *Queen of the South* when at length I went down the side of the latter ship into the launch, and as we shoved off and headed for the schooner, the dainty, slender proportions of the vessel, compared with those of the craft surrounding her,—all of which were big, lumping ships,—and still more, with the immensity of the boundless plain upon which she floated, impressed themselves upon me almost with the force of a shock, and for a moment I wondered at my own temerity and that of my crew in daring to brave the utmost fury of wind and wave in so toylike a structure. But as we drew up with her again, and approached her closely enough to discern the manifold beauties of her perfectly-moulded hull, the subtle curves and swellings and hollows of her exquisite shape, cunningly contrived to afford her the maximum of support with the minimum of resistance, I thought that I would rather face a hurricane in her than in any other craft of those around us.

And, indeed, it appeared as though an opportunity, such as we had not yet had, was about to be afforded us for testing the staunchness of the *Evangeline* and her behaviour in heavy weather; for during the progress of my visit to the *Queen of the South* the aspect of the heavens had been undergoing a very remarkable change. The cloud-bank in the south-western quarter had risen as high as the zenith, while its extremities had at the same time spread so far that they promised soon to meet in the north-east, leaving about one quarter of the sky still un-

veiled in the form of an almost perfect circle. It was not so much the spreading of the bank, however, as its altered structure, that attracted my attention. There had been nothing in the least formidable in the aspect of the clouds upon their first appearance, but it was now evident that there were very potent influences at work among them, for by subtle, imperceptible gradations of change their character had become entirely altered. The masses had grown enormously in bulk, and had gradually become of a livid blue colour, as though they were being rapidly charged with electricity, while they were slowly forming themselves into the most extraordinary shapes I had ever beheld, the general appearance of the western heavens much more closely resembling a vast wall built of titanic masses of livid-hued rock than a curtain of impalpable vapour. The sun made his presence apparent behind these enormous blocks of cloud-masonry by tinging their lower edges with horizontal streaks of white light, gradually changing to a fiery yellow, and, later on, to scarlet as he neared the horizon, that greatly helped the illusion by conveying the idea of joints in the stupendous wall. At length, just as the sun reached the horizon, another change in the aspect of the extraordinary panorama occurred, a break appearing in the mass of cloud and rapidly widening out until it took the exact form of a vast square gateway or aperture, through which the sun's disc was fully revealed as an enormous rayless globe of red-hot metal glowing through a vaporous film of atmo-

sphere that magnified it to an extent that was startlingly and appallingly beyond its normal dimensions as it rested palpitating upon the very verge of the horizon. The colour of the sky in which this flaming apparition hung, as seen through the vast portal in the clouds, was of a vivid, fiery, saffron hue; while shafts of ruddy light streamed from the luminary through the opening and smote upon the cloud-masses in flakes of flame, giving them the aspect of being composed of incandescent rock. The appearance of the whole was indeed so weird and startling, so gloomily and wildly magnificent, that no effort was needed to conceive what we looked upon as the veritable entrance to the nether regions, with the adamantine gates flung open and the walls aglow with the fierceness of the infernal fires. And, to add to the appalling character of the picture, a large, full-rigged ship floated black as ebony on the fiery horizon, stern-on to us, in the very centre of the opening, giving the idea that she was sailing straight through that flaming gateway into the fiery world beyond. As the sun sank below the glowing water, bars of black cloud shot out athwart the opening horizontally and vertically, while the head of the archway curved until it bore an astoundingly exact resemblance to the Gothic gateway of some stupendous castle with the portcullis down; the sky beyond glowing every moment with fiercer and more ruddy fires, until one might have supposed that all heaven behind that gloomy archway had burst into flame. Then gradually the fires burnt out, the glowing sky changed to

the hue of blood, the walls and head of the archway collapsed and crumbled into ruin, and in a few minutes the cloudy gap was once more closed, and night was upon us.

Never in all my life had I beheld a more strange and weird spectacle than that sunset; yet there was nothing portentous about it—nothing more threatening, to my mind, than the promise of a smart thunderstorm, with perhaps a wind-squall to follow. But when I went below to dinner, I found that the mercurial and aneroid barometers both showed a fall of very nearly half an inch.

Upon my return to the deck again, about three bells in the second dog watch, a profound and impenetrable darkness had closed down upon the scene, notwithstanding the fact that there was a moon in her first quarter somewhere behind the sooty pall that had by this time completely obscured the heavens. So dark, indeed, was it that even after I had been on deck for fully ten minutes, and had quite got the glare of the saloon lamps out of my eyes, it was impossible to distinguish any object about the decks except where it fell within the radiance emanating from the skylights or the binnacle; and I had already—while at dinner—heard Purkiss order the launch to be brought alongside and hoisted to the davits. The silence was absolutely oppressive in its intensity, for the ship was as motionless as though she had been lying in a dock; there was no gurgle or wash of water along the bends or under the counter, no creaking

of bulkheads, not even the sound of a footfall upon the deck fore or aft; for Purkiss was standing at the binnacle, gazing contemplatively into it, while the hands forward seemed, by the appearance of a small ruddy spark here and there on the forecastle, to be lounging about the windlass and cat-heads, smoking their pipes in perfect silence. A red or a green light, or both, here and there in the darkness round about us, marked the position of some motionless ship; but not a sound of any kind came stealing along the surface of the black water to tell us that we were not absolutely alone in this Egyptian darkness. The awnings had been rolled up fore and aft, every thread of canvas was furled on board the yacht, the running rigging hauled taut and coiled down, and there was absolutely nothing to be done until some indication should reach us of the character of the change that was brewing overhead.

Thus matters continued with us until two bells in the first watch, when, as the bell was being struck, a faint, ghostly radiance seemed to fall upon the deck from aloft, and, glancing up to see from whence it proceeded, I observed a very brilliant corposant, like a ball of lambent green flame, apparently about six inches in diameter, shining upon the fore-royal mast-head. It hung there as steadily as though it had been a lamp fixed to the truck, for about half a minute, when it slowly descended the spar until it reached the larboard backstay, down which it glided with a very deliberate movement until it arrived

at the rail, along which it travelled until it almost reached the main rigging, when it suddenly vanished.

"That looks bad, Mr. Berrington, sir, don't it?" remarked Purkiss, as he left the binnacle and sauntered to my side. "I *have* heard it said, sir, that when them things boards you it's a good sign if they stays at the mastheads, or goes up to 'em, but it's bad when they comes down. Now, my idea is"—

Flash! The clouds overhead were rent apart in a blaze of blue light so unendurably dazzling and brilliant that it seemed to sear and blast one's very eyeballs, though not until a stream of livid green fire had fallen from it into the sea away to the northward of us; and then came a crash of thunder so appalling in its deafening intensity and volume of sound that it smote upon the ear with the sensation of a heavy, stunning blow, while the ship quivered to her keel with the concussion of it and the heavy, resounding echoes that rolled along the smooth surface of the sleeping sea.

"By Jove," said I, "we are going to have a sharp thunderstorm, Purkiss. You had better have the lightning conductors roused out and hoisted at once."

And as the old sea-dog roared out the order, I walked to the companion and glanced through it to see what the barometers had to say about the matter. They were still falling, though not to such an extent as to forebode anything very serious.

A period of perhaps five minutes elapsed after the first

flash of lightning ere we had another, and then the storm seemed to break upon us all in a moment, the whole firmament being ablaze with electric fires, sometimes darting from cloud to cloud, like ships exchanging broadsides, but more often lancing in long streams of fire earthward. And presently, while the lightning was flashing all round us, and the ship quivering from stem to stern with the shock and concussion of the thunder-peals, the floodgates of heaven were opened, and down came the rain in such a foaming cascade as though the bottom of the clouds had tumbled out, and in a moment the decks were all afloat and the scuppers running full, while the sea all round us, as far as the veil of rain would permit us to see, was flogged by the descending torrents into a surface of vivid phosphorescent glow of pale blue fire. The milky surface threw up a pale, ghostly glow against which the bulwarks of the yacht, right to the eyes of her, stood out in bold relief; but so dense was the sheet of the descending rain that it was impossible to see farther than a hundred fathoms on either hand. To anyone who had never witnessed such a sight before, the spectacle from the yacht's deck of the luminous sea on which we floated, with the vivid lightning lancing hither and thither in continuous flashes and blazings of vari-coloured fires through the wall of crystal rain which enveloped us, filling the atmosphere with a prismatic glitter as from unnumbered millions of falling diamonds, would have been perfectly entrancing, despite the deafening roar of

the rain mingling with the deeper diapason of the thunder; but I had seen it so often before that the sight had lost its novelty, and I was not sorry when, after a downpour of some seven or eight minutes, the rain ceased as abruptly as it had begun.

CHAPTER VIII

CAUGHT IN A CYCLONE

THE next few days were remarkable for nothing save the obstinacy with which the wind—what little there was of it—persisted to blow from precisely that one of the thirty-two points of the compass—namely, the south-west—which was most unwelcome to us; and not only did it persistently remain foul, but it as persistently remained light, so that, despite our utmost efforts, it was not until midnight of Sunday, the 23rd of September, that we caught the south-east Trade winds, in latitude 2° 40′ S. and longitude 30° 41′ W., twenty days out from Cowes. They were blowing very lightly, and about due east, when we first fell in with them, and although they freshened somewhat afterwards, they were never so strong but that we could have comfortably carried more canvas than we had to show to them; hence it occupied us until the morning of Saturday, the 29th of September, to reach latitude 24° 24′ S., longitude 36° 47′ W., where we lost the south-east Trades and ran into a calm. During the whole of this time we had had the usual delightful

Trade weather, and we had neither sighted a single sail, nor had any incident worthy of note occurred to break in upon the monotony of our passage.

The weather was intensely hot, for the sun was almost directly overhead, and as the afternoon advanced the clouds that came floating up from the north-east began to assume a somewhat thundery appearance, at which I was not surprised, nor did I attach any particular significance to the fact that about five o'clock that evening the glass exhibited a tendency to fall. The sea was at that time as smooth as oil, and the south-easterly swell was rapidly going down.

As the sun approached the horizon, however, a somewhat windy look crept into the sky; the blue lost its beautifully pure tint, and became pale, with a streaky appearance, as though vapours at that time too thin and ethereal for the human eye to accurately determine their presence were gradually assembling in the higher reaches of the atmosphere; the clouds were gathering way and moving with some degree of celerity out from the north-east, and it appeared to me that a swell was beginning to creep up from the same quarter. The sunset, too, had a distinctly windy appearance, the orb showing through the clouds that way as a shapeless blotch of yellow colour, with flaring dashes of smoky-looking vapour spreading from it.

On going below to dinner, I noticed that the barometer was still falling, rather rapidly now, while there could be

no question as to the fact that the ship's motion was distinctly more uneasy than it had been an hour or two before. Even as I sat at the table she gave two or three rather heavy lurches, causing the ponderous mainboom to jerk violently at the sheet; and presently, after a still heavier roll, I heard Purkiss call to the watch to lay aft and stow the mainsail.

When I returned to the deck again, it was pitch dark, the sky being wholly obscured by the clouds that had gathered during the interval of my sojourn below; there was never a star to be seen in the whole expanse of the visible firmament, and the moon—then taking off and approaching her last quarter—would not rise until after nine o'clock. As I emerged from the companion, Purkiss came up to me and said—

"I've took the mains'l off her, Mr. Berrington, sir, and had it stowed. It was doin' no good, and only wearin' of itself out thrashin' about, besides the chance of springin' the mast. What d'ye think of the weather, sir?"

I went to the binnacle, and, glancing into it, found that the schooner was lying with her head pointing to the north-west, with the swell coming up from the north-east, the vessel lying broadside-on to it.

"I think," said I, "that we are going to have a blow from the north-east, and by the look of the barometers it promises to be a heavy one. You acted wisely in stowing the mainsail, Purkiss, and I think it would not

be amiss if you were to get in all the light canvas as well, until we see what is going to happen."

"I've been thinkin' the same myself, sir," answered Purkiss. "If we strip her to the taups'l, standin' jib, fore-stays'l, and boom-fores'l, we shan't do amiss, whatever happens, and that'll leave us about ready for anything. Hands, shorten sail!" he bellowed, and then went rolling away forward to superintend the operation.

The moon was due to rise at about ten minutes after nine; but at four bells it seemed darker than ever, by which time the schooner was rolling to her covering-boards with a quick, jerky, most unpleasant motion, and shortly afterwards there was a shimmer of sheet lightning in the north-east, by the illumination of which we were enabled to see that the clouds were banking up heavily in that quarter, with a very black and threatening aspect about them. A second flash of lightning quickly followed, and in a few minutes the whole of the horizon, from north round to the south of east, was pulsating with quivering flashes of blue and green and yellow light, faint at first, but rapidly increasing in brilliancy, until the display became as magnificent as anything of the kind that I had ever seen. So brilliant were some of the flashes that the whole cloud panorama from horizon to horizon was completely revealed, giving the semblance of a continuous mountain range of vast and fantastically shaped peaks illumined by the flashing of unnumbered heavy but noiseless guns hidden in the valleys between. Then,

after a more than usually vivid blaze of light, came the low, hollow muttering of distant thunder, and in a few minutes the storm was above the horizon, with the lightning quivering and glancing in all directions, accompanied by a continuous increasing rumble and reverberation, as though gigantic cannon balls were being hurled along the cloudy floor above us. The enormous stooping shapes that hung overhead, black, ponderous, and threatening, appeared to be literally bursting with electricity; for no sooner did the fork and chain lightning begin to play than the discharges became incessant, as though one excited and provoked another, and very soon the whole firmament was ablaze with lightning and filled with the deafening crash and boom of the thunder, suggesting the idea of a terrific and obstinately fought battle between hostile fleets away aloft there among those writhing clouds. There was a strong odour of electricity in the oppressively hot and breathless atmosphere, and during the few minutes that the heart of the storm hung over us the entire firmament appeared to be ablaze; then, all in a moment, down plumped the rain upon us.

"Now stand by!" I shouted to Purkiss, who was at my side. "We shall get the wind presently, and plenty of it, unless I am greatly mistaken. Let them hand the topsail and stow the jib while it is possible for them to do so."

"Ay, ay, sir," he answered. "Topsail halliards and sheets let go and clew up. Let go your jib halliards, and



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man the downhaul! Look alive, lads, and stow the canvas while you can."

The men were still on the topsail-yard when the rain ceased, and were busy making up the bunt of the sail when the first puff struck us. It caught the schooner fair on the starboard beam, and although she had only the fore-staysail and boom-foresail upon her, it hove her over until the water was almost flush with the larboard rail in the waist of the ship. It came and went in a moment, however, before even she could gather steerage-way; and by the time that the next gust struck us, the men had stowed the topsail and were laying down off the yard. This was scarcely so savage as the other, but it lasted rather longer; and before it had done with us, the schooner was slued with her stern to the north-east, ready for the outfly. A third and a fourth gust struck us, however, before it came, and then far away astern a line of ghastly white foam loomed up out of the blackness, and a low hissing, moaning sound became audible. It bore down upon us with the speed of an express train—and with the shriek of one, too, as it goes thundering headlong through a wayside station—striking us with the force of something solid. I was standing right aft, on the opposite side of the wheel to the helmsman, ready to lend him a hand if necessary, when the squall reached us; and as the spume and spray flew over the schooner, and the wind raved and shrieked through her rigging, she buried her nose in the sea as though she was about to dive

to the bottom, and the main-topmast, at which I involuntarily glanced, bent forward like the rod of a fisherman who has hooked a heavy salmon. I fully expected to see it snap short off at the cap; but the nimble little hooker instantly gathered way, and was off like a bird before the howling blast, going along as smoothly and almost as fast as though she had been a sledge travelling over a frozen lake.

The first mad fury of the outfly spent itself in a few minutes, and the wind then moderated somewhat; but it still blew very heavily, and by the rapid shrinkage of the mercury that was now going on in the barometer tube, I was convinced that at the back of all this there was something rather out of the ordinary way. Purkiss fully agreed with me in this; for, apart from the heavy drop in the barometer, the sky had a very wild and threatening look, the lightning that still quivered occasionally among the clouds showing them to be rent into shreds and trailing tatters that, from their shape alone, we knew must be careering across the zenith at headlong speed. We therefore determined to put the ship into trim for the worst that could possibly happen, while it still remained in our power to do so; and, all hands being called, they were at once set to work to send the yards and topmasts down on deck, and rig in the jib-boom. It was a tremendously formidable job, for the strength of the wind was such that, scudding though we were before it, it was almost as much as the men could do to avoid being

blown out of the rigging and overboard the moment that they showed themselves above the bulwarks. But they were all picked hands and prime seamen, "every hair a rope-yarn, and every finger a fish-hook," and there were plenty of them; moreover, they one and all fully realised the imperative necessity for snugging the schooner as thoroughly as possible, so by dint of hard work the task was accomplished by eight bells, and when the watch went below everything had been done that was possible to ensure the safety of the little craft.

I had taken a glance at the compass card almost immediately after the outburst of the gale upon us, and had noted the fact that, running dead before it as we were, the schooner was heading south-west; the direction of the wind was consequently north-east. At eight bells, when the watch was changed, I chanced to take another look into the binnacle, and discovered that the wind had veered a couple of points, the schooner then heading west-south-west. Half an hour later I observed that a further shift had taken place in the direction of the wind, for although the helmsman was still keeping the ship dead before it, we were now heading west-and-by-south, and a little later on the compass card swung true to west. This steady veering action on the part of the wind fully confirmed certain suspicions that had arisen in my mind as I watched the development of the weather, and I now knew that we were involved in a cyclone, or circular storm, and were careering round with it. This fact once clearly

ascertained, our mode of procedure was clear; the storm was revolving from left to right,—as is invariably the case with cyclones in the southern hemisphere,—and all that we had to do was to heave-to on the port tack, when the schooner would dodge away from the dreaded centre or "eye" of the storm, and eventually from the storm itself.

And it was high time that some change should be made, for the sea was rising fast, and already pursued the schooner so threateningly that we were in momentary danger of being pooped. The storm fore-trysail was therefore roused out, bent, and—when everything was ready—set in place of the boom-foresail, with the starboard sheet hauled aft; when, watching our opportunity, the helm was put over to starboard, and the little craft came up almost head to wind on the port tack, shipping a tremendous sea over the port cat-head as she did so. Fortunately, however, no damage was done, for we had foreseen and taken every possible precaution against such an occurrence; the worst, therefore, that befell us was the flooding of the decks for a few minutes until the water had made its way overboard again, by way of the lee rail and through the lee ports and scuppers.

The schooner being now hove-to, the only additional thing that could be done to provide for her safety was to keep a wary eye upon the helm, and to maintain a bright lookout for other craft that might still be scudding—although I did not apprehend much danger from this source, for the sea was already so formidable, and was

making so rapidly, that no prudent seaman would continue to run much longer if he could help it; the watch on deck were therefore sent below out of harm's way, with the exception of the man at the wheel and those who had the lookout, and we now had leisure as well as opportunity to observe the progress of the gale and the schooner's behaviour in it.

The downward movement of the mercury still continued, but it was not so rapid as it had been earlier on in the night, and I was in hopes that it was nearing its point of maximum fall; but so far as the aspect of the weather was concerned, there was no indication whatever of any improvement. Indeed, it now appeared to be blowing more fiercely than ever; but this was undoubtedly due to the fact that the schooner was no longer scudding, and we therefore now felt the full power of the wind as it swept over us and through our scanty rigging, with the uproar of a thousand yelling demons mad with the thirst for destruction. The lightning had long since ceased; but the pitchy darkness that had enveloped us at the outburst of the gale had given place to a faint, ghostly light in the atmosphere, due in part, no doubt, to the presence of the moon behind the dense pall of sooty vapour that flew athwart our mastheads, but more, I imagine, to the vivid phosphorescent light emitted by the torn and foaming surges. By this light, whatever might have been its origin, the clouds overhead were rendered dimly visible as an unending procession of shapeless

patches of torn and shredded scud that swept furiously across the black background of sky beyond them, and it was enough to make a man's brain reel to stand and watch the headlong speed of their breathless flight. Still worse, however, was it to watch the relentless swoop of the sea as it came roaring down upon the schooner, its leeward slope almost as steep as the side of a house, and full of seething phosphorescent fires, while its foaming, hissing crest, ablaze with ghastly white flame, reared itself as high as the crosstrees, and poised itself above the hull of the schooner, until it seemed as though in another moment it must fall upon and crush her into shapeless staves. But the little beauty was as lively as a kitten, and at the moment when her destruction seemed inevitable, she would heel away to starboard until her rail was flush with the yeasty boiling to leeward, while the water surged and spouted in luminous cascades through her lee scuppers, and with a buoyant upward heave of her shapely bows she would go soaring away up and up, with an almost perpendicular deck, until she surmounted the threatening crest in a blinding shower of milk-white fiery spray, to settle away next moment with a long, easy, swinging weather roll, and a loud flap of the becalmed trysail, into the yawning abyss beyond. Hitherto my seagoing experiences had been confined exclusively to the crank, oversparred ships of the British navy, with an occasional passage in a mail boat, and I willingly confess that when we first rounded-to on that

terrible night I was conscious of a certain feeling of anxiety as to what would follow; but after watching for half an hour the behaviour of my dainty, beautiful schooner, I felt that, for safety, I would not exchange her for the finest liner that was ever launched.

Thus the long wearisome night wore slowly away, and when at length the laggard dawn, grey and dreary, came oozing through the shadows of the eastern sky, there seemed to be as little prospect as ever of the cessation of the gale. For the mercury was still falling, though now very slowly, and the aspect of the sky to windward—a mere smudge of pale, sickly, yellow colour, streaked with rags of hurrying scud—was as windy as it could well be; while the sea—a mad turmoil of boiling, foaming, impetuous mountain surges, laced with froth, and of a cold steel-blue colour where the light fell upon their windward slopes, and a dirty greenish-grey in the hollows — presented a truly formidable and terrifying appearance. Nor did the schooner afford a very much more exhilarating spectacle, for although she had thus far come through the struggle without so much as the stranding of a rope-yarn, the disappearance of her top-hamper and the streaming bights of such portions of her running rigging as the men had failed to haul taut in the darkness, gave her a shorn and wrecked appearance aloft which was not lessened by the dark and drenched look of the straining fore-trysail—sodden to its peak, and with the water blowing away to leeward out of it in little horizontal

streams—the decks dark with wet and knee-high with tossing, foaming water in the lee scuppers, the continuous showers of spray that flew in over the weather bow to drive in smoky mist into the sea far away to leeward, and the streams of wet that clung to the rail, the sheerpoles, the ledges of the companion and skylights, the boats' keels, and the booms, until the wind caught them as the vessel soared to the crest of a sea and tore them away like a fringe.

I had been up all night, and was therefore by no means sorry when Mitchell, looking very white and haggard about the gills, emerged from the companion and came staggering up to me with the information that my bath was ready—although, he added, the violent motion of the ship had not permitted him to put very much water in it—and that the steward had been aft to say that the coffee was ready. I accordingly lost no time in going below, got my tub, shifted into a dry suit, swallowed a cup of coffee, lighted a pipe, and then went on deck again, feeling as fresh as a lark, and shortly afterwards sat down to breakfast with an excellent appetite. I was about half-way through with it when I heard the companion slide pushed back, the doors opened and closed rapidly, the slide pushed forward again, and a footstep on the ladder. Then came a rap of the knuckles upon the saloon door, and in response to my invitation Purkiss entered.

"Well, Purkiss, anything fresh?" I inquired.

"Why, yes, sir," he answered. "We've just made out a large steamer hove-to down to leeward, and she's got a flag hoisted half-way up to her mizzen peak. I can't make out the flag through the glass because of the thick weather down where she is, but it looks like her ens'n, and if so, I expect she's in distress."

"I will go on deck and have a look at her," said I; and with that I flung my serviette upon the table, rose from my chair, and followed Purkiss up the companion-way.

"There she is, Mr. Berrington, sir," observed the skipper, holding out to me the telescope with one hand, while he indicated a small object down in the smother, broad on the lee bow.

It was some little time before I could get a good view of her, for when we sank into the trough our horizon that way was bounded by the hissing crest of the sea that we had just surmounted, and which as it went roaring away to leeward hid the sky half-way to the zenith; and when we were hove aloft, it often happened that the object for which I was seeking was away down in a hollow that hid the whole of her but the upper portion of her three masts and the top of her funnel. But that she was a steamer was certain from even this partial view of her, although I could see no sign of smoke issuing from her funnel. At length, however, we happened to both reach the top of a sea together, and for a moment I got a fair sight of her—a big lump of a craft with a straight bow, three masts, and the funnel stepped a little way forward of the mainmast.

She had the foot of her main-trysail hauled out, and there was a flag fluttering half-way up to her mizzen peak, but what it was I could not tell at that distance, the haze and mist with which the atmosphere was loaded reducing her to a mere faint silhouette in grey, even when viewed through the telescope. But I had no doubt whatever that she was in distress, and I therefore directed Purkiss to run our own ensign up to the mainmast-head and to edge down toward her.

CHAPTER IX

WE FALL IN WITH A FOUNDERING STEAMER

IT was easy enough to say that we would edge down to the steamer, but by no means as easy to do it. For with the mountainous sea that was now running—the vast slopes and towering ridges of which dwarfed the *Evangeline* to the dimensions of a child's toy—it seemed that our only hope of escape from instant destruction lay in keeping the schooner's bows pointing as nearly straight at it as possible. The wind was still at east, blowing as furiously as ever, and the steamer bore about due south from us; to get to her, therefore, it would be necessary to let the schooner go off with the sea square on her larboard beam, thus placing her in the most dangerous situation—next, perhaps, to running dead before it—that it would be possible for her to be in. The steamer, however, was undoubtedly in distress, and therefore it was our plain duty, in common humanity, to at least make the effort to reach her, although in such terrific weather as we were then experiencing I saw no possibility of our helping her, even should we succeed in getting within hail. The first

thing, however, was to reach her, and in order to do so it was necessary that sail should be made upon the schooner; we therefore roused out and bent the main-trysail and storm-staysail, reefed and set them, battened down the skylights and fore-scuttle, sent everybody but half a dozen hands into the saloon, with orders to stand by for a call, should they be needed on deck; and then Purkiss and Rogers took the wheel, while I conned the ship.

There was only one way in which our task could be accomplished with any reasonable amount of safety or hope of success, and that was to put the schooner's helm up when she was on the summit of a sea and let her go broad-off, luffing her again to meet each sea as it came racing and foaming down upon her; and I can only describe the succeeding period of forty minutes—which we took to reach the steamer—as characterised by an unbroken series of miraculous, hairbreadth escapes. The danger came, of course, from the enormous height and steepness of the sea, each gigantic billow of which towered almost as high as our lower-mastheads, and far overtopped the low spread of our storm-canvas, which was consequently becalmed almost instantly after we had surmounted the summits of these vast liquid mountain-ranges, and remained so until we were nearly at the top of the next, when, as we were hove up into it, the furious wind would smite the schooner with overwhelming force and heel her down before it almost to her beam-ends, with her deck sloping like the side of a house, while the

crest of the sea, striking her upturned bilge and bottom, poured over and smothered the poor little craft in a hurricane deluge of spray. The schooner was thus unable to get much way upon her, scarcely enough, indeed, to enable us to manœuvre her safely to the top of the next sea; and it was enough to turn a man's hair white to find the little vessel lying all along and broadside-on to a great liquid cliff, the crest of which seemed to be arching right over the craft, ready to fall upon and crush her out of existence. But somehow she always managed to get her saucy nose round in time, and at length—after such an experience as I hope never to meet with again, and during which every man of us on deck had to be securely lashed, to escape being washed or *hove* overboard by the frightful rolling of the schooner—we found ourselves ranging up on the lee quarter of the steamer, and at liberty to give her some little attention.

She was a big lump of a craft, measuring, as I judged, upwards of three thousand tons, and had all the look of a passenger ship; for her sides were pierced, fore and aft, with a double tier of scuttles, indicating extensive cabin accommodation, and her decks were encumbered with a long range of houses and an awning deck. We had been able to make out, as we edged down toward her, that her ensign was that of the Spanish merchant service—a yellow flag with two broad horizontal red stripes in it; but the pattern of this flag being the same whether hoisted upright or reversed, they doubted, I suppose, whether we

should understand that their method of hoisting it was intended to convey the fact of their being in distress, so, in order that there might be no mistake about it, they had also run up the flags N. C.—the commercial code signal of distress—as soon as we were near enough to distinguish them. As we ranged up on her lee quarter we saw the words "*Medina Sidonia—Cadiz*," in gold letters across her counter.

But where are the words capable of adequately portraying the picture of the ship as we then saw her? She was immensely long in proportion to her beam, and sat very low in the water—so low, indeed, that I thought she must have sprung a leak and was foundering. She was painted black, with a red bottom, which showed occasionally when she rolled or pitched, and her masts and funnel were also black, the only relief to this sombre colour being the bright varnished teak of her deck-houses, with their brass-framed scuttles, and the white-painted awning deck. She was ridiculously under-rigged as a three-masted schooner, and seemed to have very recently been under all the sail she could spread; but everything save the main-trysail had been blown clean away, leaving nothing but a few rags streaming here and there from the bolt-ropes; the main-trysail, however, still stood, and was set with the foot of it only hauled out. Her helm was lashed hard down, with the object, of course, of keeping her bows-on to the sea, but she had not nearly enough after-sail for this, and the result was that she had fallen off

into the trough, and never in all my life had I seen a ship making such awful weather of it as she was. She rolled so appallingly that when she heeled toward us the view of her from to leeward was pretty much the same as though we had been looking at her from a balloon hovering over her mastheads; her decks looked to be absolutely vertical, and her masts parallel with the horizon. That was the view we got of her for a moment, as she was lifted, broad-side-on, with a sickening heave, up the steep slope of a sea to its summit; then, as she reached its crest, the white foam would boil over her, and her whole hull disappear beneath an avalanche of water that poured over her upturned side as it would over a weir, or as you may have seen the sea swell and foam and pour over a half-submerged rock. She seemed to be going to pieces even as we looked at her, for the sea to leeward was dotted with wreckage—fragments of her shattered deck-houses, the side of a boat, oars, spare spars, buckets, a settee richly upholstered in pale blue damask, a music-stool, and a hencoop, with the heads of the drowning fowls protruded through the bars.

"My God! Mr. Berrington, sir, saw ever a man the like of that?" ejaculated Purkiss, as he resigned the wheel to Rogers and came staggering to my side. "Why, she can't last ten minutes longer at that rate, sir. And what's to be done to help the poor souls?"

"Ah! I would that I knew!" said I, dashing my hand to my forehead in my perplexity. "The boat is not yet

built that could live in such an awful sea as this; nor, if she could live, could she get alongside that steamer. And as to swimming, that, too, is out of the question in such a sea. The only thing I can think of is for them to jump overboard in life-buoys and trust to our being able to pick them up before they drown."

"That doesn't offer them much of a chance, sir, I'm afraid," remarked Purkiss.

"No," said I. "But they might as well try that as remain there to be drowned. That ship is doomed; she cannot live—ah, what are they about on the bridge, there? Is not that a board with writing on it that they are holding up against the lee side of the wheel-house?"

The wheel-house was a roomy structure on the level of the awning deck, and was accessible from the flying bridge,—both, from their great height above the bulwarks, seeming to be as yet undamaged,—and while I was speaking I saw two men emerge from the house, dragging what appeared to be a black-board with writing upon it, which they placed against the side of the structure, one of them kneeling down at each end to steady it. I got the telescope—for we had settled a good way to leeward of the steamer by this time—and with its aid was able to see that the object was what I had supposed—a black-board—bearing roughly inscribed in chalk the following sentence in Spanish:—

"*We are sinking fast. Help us, for the love of God!*"

"Where is that bull-board that the men were playing with on the forecastle the other night?" I inquired of Purkiss. "Have it brought aft here at once, and a lump of chalk."

Purkiss spoke to the carpenter, who happened to be one of the men on deck, and the fellow hurried away forward, accompanied by a second man, returning almost immediately with what I wanted.

"Here, you two," said I, "hold this board upright on the top of the companion while I write on it; and you, Purkiss, stand by with the glass and watch for a signal from those fellows on the steamer showing that they understand my message."

Purkiss took the telescope, and bringing it to bear upon the men on the bridge, immediately cried out that they evidently knew what we meant to do, for one of them was watching us through a glass. And thereupon I proceeded to write upon the board in Spanish—which I happened to speak pretty fluently—the following message, marking the letters one at a time and as large as possible on the board, leaving them just long enough to permit of their being deciphered, and then rubbing them out and writing the next—

"*Will get the yacht round and return. Then you must all jump overboard in life-buoys, and we will do our best to pick you up.*"

"All right, Mr. Berrington, sir; I think he understands you, for the chap with the glass waved his hand and has

gone back into the pilot-house, while t'other has gone down on to the deck," said Purkiss, when I had finished.

"Then let draw the staysail-sheet, and let us see if we can coax the schooner round, Purkiss," said I. "We *must* do it if it is at all possible; we cannot leave those poor souls there to drown."

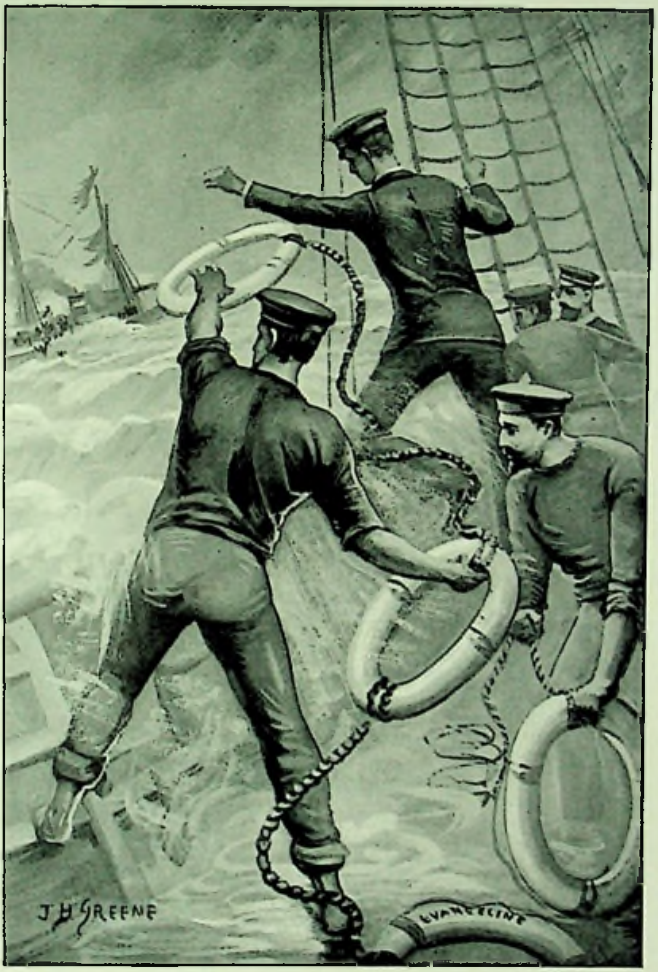
"Ay, ay, sir," answered Purkiss. "And whatever we do has to be done quickly, sir; that craft *can't* weather it out much longer. She looks to be nearly full of water a'ready."

We got way on the schooner at once, and then ensued a bit of reckless sailing such as nothing but the urgency of the case could possibly justify. The little craft was driven headlong through the seas, leaving her to take them just as she would; and at the first opportunity that offered, the helm was put down, and the beauty actually came round, shipping, however, a whole mountain of a sea as she did so, yet by a miracle sustaining no damage; and then we bore down toward the luckless steamer once more. We steered so as to shave her as close as we dared to leeward,—for we had already discovered that the schooner, with her buoyant hull and comparatively light draught, settled away to leeward much faster than the steamer,—and then all hands came on deck and stood by with bowlines, ready to assist inboard any of the unfortunate creatures who might reach us.

As we drove into the comparative shelter of the steamer's lee, and hauled the staysail-sheet to windward,

we became aware of the presence of some thirty men and women—obviously passengers—who had somehow been got up on the top of the awning deck—over which the sea broke less furiously than anywhere else—and were now clinging there for their lives, hanging on to the stays of the funnel and the main shrouds and backstays, while a group of men who looked as though they formed part of the crew of the vessel were huddled aft on the hurricane deck. So far as we could see, everybody was equipped with a life-belt; and the figures of the officers were conspicuous, clawing their way from group to group, and apparently encouraging them to take the dreadful leap overboard. Yet, frightful as was their situation, they one and all seemed to hang back and shrink from the plunge, as well they might. Yet every moment was now of priceless value, for we were drifting away to leeward at a rate that was simply appalling when one came to reflect that those people would have to swim down to and overtake us; indeed, they ought to have leaped long before. Yet not one had done so, or if they had, they were nowhere to be seen; for I had sent a hand into the fore rigging, at the peril of the man's life, to look about over the surface of the sea for swimmers, but he had been unable to find any. Then, as I stood gloomily watching our drift, and bitterly thinking that in a few minutes' time we should be too far distant to be of any use, and that thus what might possibly prove to be the last chance of escape for those unfortunates would be frittered away, an idea struck me;

and I gave directions for all our life-buoys to be lashed together in a chain, and then hove overboard, made fast to a warp constructed out of as much of our running rigging as had been unrove, and was therefore to be easily got at. The men saw at once what I wanted, and while some of them went to work upon the chain of life-buoys, others got hold of the coils of unrove gear, cut the stops, and bent the ends together, while others still went below and routed out and brought on deck every piece of line, large or small, that they could lay their hands upon, so that we soon had the materials for a very long warp. I would not wait for these, however; but no sooner were the buoys ready than I had them stretched along fore and aft the whole length of the schooner outside the weather rail, and dropped overboard, with the boatswain to tend the warp to which they were attached, and carefully pay it out so that we might not drag them after us to leeward. The result was exactly what I had anticipated; the schooner, under the pressure of her canvas, drove to leeward much faster than the buoys, and was soon a full ship's length distant from them. But I did not wait until this fact had become apparent; the moment that the buoys were let go I waved my arm and beckoned frantically for the people to jump, and they evidently understood me, for I saw several approach the side and then draw back again, unnerved by the sight of the boiling swirl below them. One man, however,—an officer I took him to be by his garb,—seemed very urgent in his efforts to



THE BUOYS WERE LET GO.

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persuade the others to jump, and presently I saw him seize a woman by the waist, remove her hands from the stay to which she clung, stagger with her to the edge of the deck, and deliberately heave her into the water. A man instantly sprang after her; another woman was tossed overboard; and then, the rest of the officers following their comrade's example, there ensued the extraordinary scene of a number of persons being flung ruthlessly from a ship's deck into a raging sea, with the object of saving their lives. For it was clear enough now that the moments of the *Medina Sidonia* were numbered. She had not a boat left in her davits; her decks, as far aft as the mainmast, were swept clear of deck-houses, skylights, companions, ventilators, everything in fact above the level of the planks; and abaft that there was little more than a melancholy remnant of twisted iron stanchions and splintered planking to show what the fittings of the ship had been; even the awning deck had now been burst up in places, showing great yawning gaps in the planking, up through which the sea surged and spouted every time that it broke over the unfortunate ship. Nor was this all, or even the worst of it; for she had settled down until the line of her main deck was almost flush with the water, and the deadly inertness of her movements, her utter lack of buoyancy, and the sickening persistency with which, having once started upon a roll or plunge, the movement —sluggish at first, but quickly augmenting in velocity— was continued in extent and duration far beyond the

point and moment when she ought to have been recovering herself, were really dreadful and terrifying to behold, beyond all power of description. So horribly dull and tardy had she now become in all her movements, that at short intervals she grew completely out of rhythm with the run of the sea, pitching when she ought to have been 'scending, and rolling to windward when she ought to have been taking a lee roll, with every movement horribly intensified and prolonged by the rush to and fro of the growing volume of water in her interior; and when these periods recurred, the wild and fearful breaches of the sea over her were a sight to be remembered to one's dying day, while it set one wondering by what miracle it was that the unfortunate wretches still clinging to her were able to maintain their hold, unless indeed it were that their clutch had become a death-grip which perhaps not even dismemberment could relax.

There were some forty or fifty people struggling in the water, three of whom had reached and were clinging to our chain of life-buoys, when one of these periods of lost rhythm recurred, and the yacht had driven to leeward until there was the space of just one sea between us and the foundering steamer, so that both craft soared to the crest of a sea at practically the same moment, with a single yawning liquid valley between them. Even at this short distance, with the stupendous sea that was now running, the *Medina Sidonia* was hidden from us to her mastheads by the intervening wave when we both settled

into the trough together; I therefore sprang into the main rigging—knowing that the end must be nigh—and, consumed by an overpowering anxiety and impulse to witness the final catastrophe that rendered me oblivious of the merciless buffeting of the gale, made my way aloft to the crosstrees, upon which I perched myself, with the remnant of our ensign slatting loudly and whipping itself to rags close beside me. As I reached my lofty perch the steamer was poised, almost upright, upon the summit of the oncoming wave, which was boiling over her in a white smother that left nothing of her visible save a short stretch of the awning deck, with its clusters of figures clinging here and there, and the three masts and funnel, with her main-trysail split and slatting to ribbons. The next moment she began to settle into the trough, and as the crest of the wave rose between her and me I saw that she had started on a weather roll; and as her masts inclined more and more, while the schooner at the same time sank into the trough, with the towering billow hissing and roaring between the two craft, and sweeping down upon us with upreared, angry crest, I lost sight of her altogether, and an ice-cold hand seemed to seize my heart as the thought flashed through my brain that now she was gone. But no! as the schooner went soaring up the steep windward slope of the approaching sea I caught sight of her again; but oh, merciful God, in what a plight! She had rolled right over until she lay completely upon her beam-ends, with her masts flat upon the water, and

her upturned starboard side and bottom showing to just below the turn of the bilge, with her bows deep sunk, and her sternpost and motionless propeller just showing above the surface of the water. She was lying flat in the trough of the sea, and her end had come. The onward slope of the next wave reached her, and she began slowly to climb it; but she was settling now, and ere the crest was reached the hull had disappeared altogether, leaving only the masts and the top of the funnel visible, and struggling slowly into an upright position as the foundering hull recovered its balance. Then the crest of the wave swept, almost without a break, over the spot where the steamer had been, swirling and foaming round the disappearing funnel and masts, and then intervening between them and me. When the schooner in her turn met the wave, and began to rise to it, the steamer had vanished, and nothing remained to show that she had ever been there save a curious vortical disturbance in the side of the next wave, in which a fragment or two of splintered plank was whirling, with what looked like a tossing, clutching human hand dotted here and there about the foam-flecked surface of the water in its immediate vicinity.

CHAPTER X

A SUSPICIOUS SAIL IS SIGHTED

MEANWHILE most of the people who had been flung or who had voluntarily leaped overboard seemed to have escaped the vortex of the sinking steamer, and were making a desperate struggle to reach the chain of life-buoys we had hove overboard for their assistance. A few of them, however, had either not seen the buoys, or did not understand our object in throwing them overboard, and these were paddling straight for the schooner in what must have proved an utterly unavailing attempt to overtake her. For the fact was that we were drifting to leeward faster than any of them could swim, and our object in streaming the chain of life-buoys overboard had of course been that the unfortunate creatures should all get hold of them and then be hauled alongside by means of the long line. Some, however, as I have said, either did not understand this, or else had failed to notice the buoys, and were rapidly exhausting themselves in an unavailing effort to reach the schooner, which had by this time drifted a considerable distance from the buoys,

leaving them well on her weather quarter. It was these errant people that I was now most anxious about, for if they did not get hold of the buoys very soon we should probably lose them altogether, and I therefore devoted all my energies to the task of persuading them, by voice and motion, to strike away in the proper direction. All to no purpose, however; and I might have shouted myself hoarse, and waved my arm until it dropped out of the socket, without avail, apparently, had not a man in uniform gone after them and explained to them, as it seemed to me, the meaning of my frantic gesticulations. His interference had the desired effect; and at length, when almost our whole available stock of line was overboard, and the moment therefore imminent when we should be obliged to begin hauling in, I had the supreme satisfaction of seeing that everybody who still survived had reached the chain, and that we might therefore begin the rather delicate operation of getting them alongside. I accordingly shouted down to Purkiss to haul in upon the line handsomely, remaining aloft, meanwhile, to see that everything went right.

It was pitiful to see the cruel, ceaseless buffeting that the unfortunate creatures clinging to the buoys and the connecting line received during the process of hauling them alongside the yacht through that terrific breaking sea; but by dint of careful watching and tireless patience the task was at length accomplished, and, one after another, the poor souls were got into the bowlines that were thrown

to them, hauled up the schooner's side, and taken below into the saloons, where the entire resources of the yacht were brought into requisition in the provision of blankets and so on, in which to wrap them; the maid Clayton doing good service by her handy, sympathetic attendance upon the women. When the last person had been hauled up the side, it was found that we had been fortunate enough to rescue no less than sixty-six, of whom nine were women, while thirty-two of the fifty-seven men formed part of the crew of the steamer. This task accomplished, the schooner was once more got round on the port tack and hove-to under her storm fore-trysail, as before.

The foundering of the Spanish steamer, although the incident demands so long and elaborate a description to convey anything like a distinct idea of it to the mental retina of the reader, took but a short time to develop to its catastrophe; and it was only seven bells in the forenoon watch when—the terrible drama ended—the yacht was once more snugged, and heading to the southward out of the storm.

As might naturally be supposed, many of the poor creatures whom we had rescued were in a fearfully exhausted condition after their long and terrible struggle for life, requiring several hours of unremitting attention to restore the vitality that seemed to have been beaten out of the senseless body; but there were a few among them whose wiry frames and tough constitutions seemed to have brought them through the awful ordeal practically

scathless, and conspicuous among these was the man in uniform whom I had seen swimming about in the water, encouraging the rest, and directing them to make for our chain of life-buoys.

This individual—Señor Venadito—proved to be the chief mate of the *Medina Sidonia*, and from him I learned that the ill-fated steamer had left Monte Video, bound for Cadiz, on the evening of the preceding Tuesday, with a full cargo, and one hundred and thirty-two passengers on board, in addition to her crew of one hundred all told, out of which we had saved sixty-six persons, leaving no less than one hundred and sixty-six who had perished through the catastrophe. The steamer had been caught, like ourselves, in the cyclone during the previous night, and at midnight had been brought-to with her head to the east-south-east, and her engines slowed down to a speed that would just enable her to stem the sea comfortably; and all had gone well with her until daybreak, when, just as it was getting light enough for those on board to see around them, the main shaft had broken, and left them helpless to fall off into the trough of the sea. Immediately upon the occurrence of this accident, sail had been made upon the ship, with the idea of heaving her to on the port tack; but the canvas was for the most part old and rotten, and no sooner was it set than—all but the main-trysail—it had blown out of the bolt-ropes, and all attempts to keep the steamer head-on to the sea had proved useless. Then ensued a terrible scene on board;

the sea at once began to break over the ship, and in a short time all the boats on the weather side were smashed to pieces, the deck-houses stove in, ventilators carried away, and the water began to make its way below, despite all that could be done to keep it out. The steam-pumps were then set going, but still the water gained upon them; and shortly before they sighted us to windward the furnace fires were extinguished by the rise of the water in the stoke-hole, and then they knew that the ship was doomed. An attempt was then made to launch the boats under the lee of the steamer; but boat after boat was swamped, and the attempt had already been abandoned when we hove in sight. Señor Venadito was of opinion, from what the captain had told him, that at least a dozen passengers had been killed or drowned in their cabins; but the majority of the lost had perished in the abortive attempt to launch the boats, and he did not think that more than thirty or forty persons—of whom the captain was one—had gone down with the ship. It was the captain, it appeared, who had initiated the extreme measure of throwing the women overboard in their life-belts; and Señor Venadito said that the struggles and resistance of the poor distracted creatures were frightful to witness, and had made him feel like a murderer when, in obedience to orders, he proceeded to follow the captain's example.

Shortly after noon that day—Sunday, of all days of the week!—there was a break in the clouds away to the

southward and eastward, and soon afterwards it became apparent that we had seen the worst of the weather. The wrack overhead broke up, and patches of blue sky appeared through the openings, pale and misty-looking at first, but clearing gradually; while there was a perceptible diminution in the strength of the wind. By six bells in the afternoon watch the sky had cleared sufficiently to permit of our getting an observation of the sun for our longitude, and at eight bells the wind and sea had so far moderated that we were able to show a little more canvas to it and bear away upon our course. Both wind and sea now rapidly went down, for the gale and ourselves were evidently moving in opposite directions; and when the moon rose that night, shortly before four bells in the first watch, we had seemingly passed out of that part of the ocean that had been subjected to the influence of the cyclone, for we had nothing worse than a rather heavy swell to contend with, while the wind had softened down to an extent that allowed us to set the whole of our lower canvas. This improving condition of the weather was maintained throughout the night; and when I went on deck next morning, to take a look round before breakfast, I found that Purkiss had once more got our topmasts on end, our yards across, and every stitch of canvas packed upon the schooner that would draw upon a taut bowline; the wind being light, at about west-south-west, with a very moderate amount of sea running.

It was a wonderfully beautiful and bland morning

this, of Monday, the 1st of October; the sky a clear, rich blue in the zenith, softening through an infinity of subtle, tender tints to a delicate, warm flesh colour around the horizon, with only one patch of cloud in it—a large island of fine white fleecy vapour, daintily mottled into a countless assemblage of very small contiguous cloudlets stretched in horizontal strata across the sky to windward over an arc of some five points of the compass, and making, with its infinitude of small shapes and indescribable delicacy of shadowing, a marvellously beautiful picture of fanciful cloudscape as it floated in tender, brilliant contrast against the blue. The sea was as pure but a rather deeper blue than the sky, and came swelling to the schooner's starboard bow in long regular folds of swell, gently rippled into small sparkling wavelets by the tender breathing of the warm, exhilarating air; while away on the lee beam it was a broad expanse of blinding, white, flashing dazzle under the palpitating brilliancy of the sun. The wind was all too languid to give the smallest edge of foam to the dancing ripples, but an air of animation was imparted to the gently-heaving, throbbing expanse of sapphire by the shoals of flying-fish that sparked out at frequent intervals from the heart of the surge under the yacht's keen, wedge-like stem, and went sailing and skimming away on either hand, as though the vessel were chipping handfuls of newly-coined silver out of Daddy Neptune's coffers. The yacht, that had reminded one of a maimed sea-bird during the gale, was now her old dainty, stately self once

more, with everything in its proper place, all her pinions spread, running gear hauled taut and coiled down, brass-work and guns brilliantly polished, sails gleaming as white as pearl in the brilliant atmosphere and set to a hair, and, in short, looking as gay and holiday-like a craft as she had ever shown in the Solent—excepting, that is to say, for the crowded state of her decks, in which respect she more closely resembled an emigrant ship than a yacht. For the whole of the sixty-six people rescued from the *Medina Sidonia* had by this time completely recovered from the effects of their dreadful experience of the preceding day, and were now on deck, enjoying the delicious breathing of the warm air and the placid beauty of the glorious scene,—so wonderful and exquisite a contrast from the wild fury of the weather only twenty-four hours before, —the crew fraternising with our own lads on the forecastle, laughing and jabbering and gesticulating with just as much animation and enjoyment as though each clearly understood the speech of the other; while the passengers crowded round Señor Venadito and myself, listening to and joining in the discussion as to the best course to be pursued under the circumstances. I was for making the best of my way to Rio—only some three hundred and twenty miles to the westward of us—and landing everybody there; not from any want of hospitality on my part, but simply because the yacht could not accommodate so many people. But the poor souls reminded me that they were absolutely destitute of everything but the clothes

that they stood in, and that therefore, under any circumstances, it would be absolutely necessary that they should return to Monte Video before pursuing their journey, and they so earnestly entreated me to convey them there, instead of to Rio, that I could not possibly refuse, especially as it was scarcely, if anything, more out of my way; and so the question was settled. And when I came to reflect upon it afterwards, I was not sorry that this decision had been arrived at, as it afforded at least a chance of our falling in with some craft bound into the Plate, on board of which I might be able to tranship these people, and so go once more upon my way, without appreciable loss of time. For I *had* lost a good deal of that priceless commodity of late, I considered; while we had been towing slowly through the equatorial calms, lying baffled among squalls and waterspouts, or hove-to in the cyclone, the *Olga* had, in all probability, been bowling away to the southward, and reeling off her ten to twelve knots as regularly as the hours came round, and I already began to foresee the possibility of her sliding into the Pacific before us and hiding herself within its immeasurable confines, leaving no shadow of a clue behind to teach us where to look for her. Besides, I knew not what base treachery, what cruel villainy, might be in the comtesse's mind in carrying my darling away into those vast solitudes, but that there *was* some well-defined sinister design in it I felt certain, and I was therefore in a perfect fever and fury of anxiety to overtake the *Olga* and rescue

my lost love before that design could be carried into execution. I ought to mention that I had inquired of Venadito whether he had seen anything of such a craft as the *Olga*, and he had replied that our vessel was the first he had sighted since leaving port.

With these feelings and convictions, then, in my mind, I communicated to Purkiss my intention of putting into Monte Video, unless in the interim we should fall in with a ship bound into the river, into which the rescued Spaniards could be transferred; and for the remainder of that day and the whole of the next we kept all on as we were — our course, with the wind as it then was, being the same as though we had made no alteration in our plans.

Throughout the whole of that Monday and Tuesday the weather remained as I have described it, the wind coming to us in so soft and gentle an air that the yacht's speed for the entire period averaged only a bare six knots per hour, which, with the further exasperating fact that we were off our proper course, excited my impatience to fever pitch, and rendered me at times but a poor host, I fear, to the unfortunate creatures who had been thrust upon my hospitality by no fault of their own. Creeping thus sluggishly along, we found ourselves at noon, on the second day of October, in latitude 29° 18′ S., and longitude 36° 57′ W., when the breeze freshened a trifle, and our speed rose to eight knots. Since crossing the Line I had constantly maintained the practice of keeping a hand

aloft as a lookout on the royal-yard, whenever the weather would permit; for, despite my apprehensions, there was, of course, always the possibility that the *Olga* might have met with as much delay as ourselves, in which case it was on the cards that she might be sighted ahead at any moment.

It was just a few minutes before four bells in the afternoon watch that day, that a sail was reported from aloft as having hove in sight about two points on our port bow; but any hopes that might have been excited within me by this intimation were speedily dashed by the news that, so far as the lookout could discover, she was a full-rigged ship, as yet too far off to enable him to discern in which direction she was steering. But although, being a full-rigged ship, she could not be the *Olga*, there was still a possibility that she might be a craft bound for the Plate; I therefore directed the schooner to be kept away a point, in order that we might edge down nearer to her, and at the same time gave the man aloft orders to keep his eye upon her and let me know how she was heading, as soon as he had satisfied himself upon that point. Shortly afterwards he hailed to say that the stranger was steering north, as he could now make out that she was under royal studding-sails, and about ten minutes later he hailed the deck to report a second sail in the wake of the first one, also under royal studding-sails on both sides of her.

The fact that these craft were steering north effectually

disposed of any hope that I might be enabled to tranship the Spaniards into either of them, and I had already directed the helmsman to once more bring the yacht up as close to the wind as she would lie, when the man on our royal-yard once more hailed—

"On deck, there!"

"Hillo!" answered Purkiss.

"D'ye hear anything partic'lar down there, sir?" demanded the man.

"No, I can't say as we do," replied Purkiss. "Do *you*?"

"Well, twice within about the last ten minutes I've fancied as I've heard a sound like firin'—and, dash me, there it is again, quite plain this time, sir!"

"Firin'!" grumbled Purkiss. "Who should be firin', and at what, in these here waters? I didn't hear anything, Mr. Berrington, sir; did you?"

"No," said I. "Yet that is not surprising either, for if the fellow aloft is not sure about the matter, how should we, down on deck here, hear it through the seething of the water alongside, the hum of the wind aloft, and the jabbering of all these people?"

"That's very true, sir," agreed Purkiss; "but what I want to know is"—

"*There*, sir! Did ye hear it that time?" shouted the fellow from aloft, in great excitement. "It seems to be coming from one or the other of them two craft ahead, and just now I thought I saw the sun gleamin' on

something like a puff of white cannon smoke just ahead of the starnmost one."

It seemed to me that at the instant before the man cried out I had caught the faint, doubtful echo of a scarcely perceptible *boom* in the air, and Purkiss was not very sure but that he, too, had heard it; so, to settle the matter, I requested him to go up as far as the royal-yard, taking the glass with him, that he might see what he could make of it.

The old fellow shinned up the rigging with wonderful agility considering his years, and presently seated himself comfortably on the royal-yard, with his left elbow resting upon the truck and his telescope steadied against the spindle of the vane, the lookout having shifted over to leeward to make room for him. He had scarcely disposed of himself to his liking when a faint but most unmistakable *boom* came floating to us, at least half a dozen hands on the forecastle crying out that they had distinctly heard it; while Purkiss shouted down to me that there was no mistake about it, there certainly *was* firing going on somewhere in the neighbourhood, and he'd be smothered if he didn't believe it was between them two chaps away down there to the south'ard. Then he took another squint at them through his glass, and presently remarked—

"Ay, sir, it's them, sure enough—leastway, it's the starnmost of 'em, for I can see the white powder smoke risin' and spreadin' ahead of her like a small cloud."

"How do they bear now, Purkiss?" I demanded.

"The leadin' craft is about three points on the port bow, sir; t'other chap is about a point astarn of her," came the answer.

"Then hold on aloft there, both of you!" I shouted. "I am about to brace in the yards and bear down toward them to see what is the matter. Say when you are ready. How is her head?" I demanded of the fellow at the wheel.

"South, half-west, sir," was the reply.

"Then let her go off to south-east," said I. "Lay aft here, some of you, to the braces, and one hand ease off the mainsheet. Ease up the head-sheets a foot or two, some of you there on the forecastle. Lay aloft, two or three hands, and rig out the weather stunsail-booms."

The schooner paid off, bringing what little wind there was square abeam, the yards were braced in, the sheets of the fore and aft canvas eased off, and the hands were in the act of sending the studding-sails aloft, the sound of firing floating softly but with increasing distinctness down to us twice or thrice more meanwhile, when Purkiss suddenly sang out in great excitement that the leading ship had rounded-to, and that the other was closing with her fast.

"How does the leading ship bear now, Purkiss?" I asked.

"Half a point on the weather bow, sir," was the reply.

"Let her come up half a point," said I to the helmsman. "*Now* where is she, Purkiss?"

"As straight in line with our jib-boom end as ever she can be," answered Purkiss.

"Thank you," shouted I. "You may as well come down now."

The old fellow was soon on deck again and bustling aft to tell me what he had seen.

"The leadin' ship is full-rigged, Mr. Berrington, sir," he began, "and I take it that she'll turn out to be a craft of well over a thousand tons. T'other I hardly knows what to make of, because, comin' pretty nigh end-on to us, you see, sir, I could only distinguish her foremast, which is square-rigged. At first I took her for a small barque; but come to look again, I couldn't make out any yards abaft her foremast, so I set her down at last for a brigantine. But if she *is*, she is a lumpin' big craft of her rig, sir; as big a brigantine, I should think, as ever I set eyes on."

"Well, Purkiss," said I, "what is the meaning of it all? Are you *sure* that the firing we heard came from them?"

"*Must* have, sir," answered Purkiss, with conviction. "There's nothin' else in sight that it *could* come from; besides, I saw the smoke risin' up and floatin' away on the breeze ahead of the starnmost one. Oh yes, Mr. Berrington, there's no doubt it was one of them two, if not both, that was makin' the row."

"Well," said I, "it is a most extraordinary thing that, in these days of steam and telegraphs, and high civilisation, generally,—to say nothing of universal peace and law and order,—we should fall in with a couple of craft away out here in the South Atlantic hammering away at one

another as though we had slid back into the good old times when the whole eastern coast of South America—ay, and a good slice of the western coast, too — swarmed with buccaneers and picaroons, and honest merchantmen had to go very nearly as heavily armed and manned as though they had been men-o'-war. However, we shall soon know all about it, I suppose, for yonder show the royals of the ship, and we are slipping fast through the water."

"Wouldn't it be a good plan to send all these here people below, Mr. Berrington, and cast loose the guns and load 'em, in case by any chance they should happen to be wanted?" inquired Purkiss.

I looked the old fellow hard in the face, and said—

"Why, Purkiss, you surely don't mean to say you have the least notion that either of those craft will interfere with *us*?"

"Why not, sir?" he answered sturdily. "Why should the brigantine fire at the ship, and not at us? Depend upon it, sir, that chap ain't no good; and though, if my own father had told me so, I'd never have believed that picaroonin' had survived to these days, I certainly *do* think that there's one of the gentry over there. And why not, Mr. Berrington, sir? It's all very well to talk about men-o'-war bein' everywhere, but how many men-o'-war have *we* seen durin' this trip? And it seems to me that if a chap minds what he's about, he may do a deal of plunderin' even in these days without bein' suspected. All you've got to do is to jog up and down some part of

the ocean that ain't too well frequented, takin' care to have a good smart craft under foot, and when you falls in with a solitary sail you edges down upon her, lays yourself alongside of her, and, with your crew of forty or fifty hands to throw in on her decks, she's yours afore her people can say Jack Robinson. Then, havin' got all you wants out of her, you cuts her people's throats and scuttles her; and who's to be any the wiser? And who's to suspect you if, when you're fallen in with by a man-o'-war, you shows your colours—English, French, Spanish, Dutch, or what not—signals to 'em that you're, say, the *Merry Dun* o' Dover, from this port to t'other, so many days out, all well, and asks to be reported? A smart, unscrupulous chap might do a good deal of work in that way before ever he was found out, Mr. Berrington, if only he took care of what he was about, sir."

"He *might*, certainly," I assented, "if chance and circumstances happened to favour him; but he would inevitably be found out at last. Every successful act of piracy would only embolden him to transgress still further; and so he would go on until luck happened to turn against him, and permitted a ship to escape from his clutches, when the circumstance of the attack or pursuit would be reported, and a dozen men-o'-war would be despatched by as many Governments to scour the seas until they found and captured him."

"No doubt, sir, no doubt," agreed Purkiss. "The worst of it is that people who engages in a career of crime

always considers theirselves so wonderful smart and clever that *they're* never likely to be caught, although they hears of others bein' caught and punished every day. Now, there was"—

"On deck, there!" hailed the man on the royal-yard at this juncture.

"Hillo! what now?" responded Purkiss.

"The two craft ahead have closed, sir; and the starn-most one—which is a brigantine, as you thought—has just sent three boats away to the ship."

Purkiss looked at me expressively for a moment, as though he would say, "What think you of that as a confirmation of my suspicion?" and then answered—

"Very well. Keep your eye on them two vessels, my lad, and report everything you sees. *Now*, Mr. Berrington, what d'ye think of it, sir?"

"It looks very queer, I must admit," said I. "Call all hands, Purkiss, and have the decks cleared for action. The matter must be looked into, and we must be prepared to play the part of policeman, if need be; though it scarcely seems credible that there should be an act of piracy in course of perpetration down there. I'll take a jaunt up aloft and see for myself how things are going."

I accordingly called to the steward to bring up my own special binoculars, and having secured them over my shoulder, made my way up the fore rigging to the royal-yard.

CHAPTER XI

WE ENGAGE AND CAPTURE A PIRATE BRIGANTINE

ARRIVED at my lofty post, I found that both craft had swung within the limits of the horizon as viewed from there, and were now not more than fourteen miles distant.

The ship—a long, low craft of about twelve hundred tons, with all the look of a clipper in her raking masts, taunt spars, and double topgallant-yards — was hove-to with her head to the westward, and every appearance of the direst confusion in the way that her studding-sails hung from her yardarms, flapping about in the breeze with tacks and sheets all adrift, and her royal and topgallant halliards let go. The brigantine — whose main truck seemed to tower almost as high above the water as that of the ship—was also hove-to on the port tack, on the ship's weather bow, and seemingly within biscuit-toss of her; and presently I saw the three boats that had pulled on board the ship leave her and go alongside the brigantine again. The two craft were, however, still too far distant to enable me to see very much of what was going on on

board them; but after an interval of perhaps a minute—just long enough to allow the boats to be hooked on and hoisted to the davits—the brigantine swung her yards, and, hauling out across the bows of the ship, *headed straight for us*!

"By Jove," thought I, "that looks like business, at anyrate!" and I caught the fellow on the other side of the mast peering curiously at me, as though he would fain have read in my face what I thought of the aspect of affairs *now*. I made no remark, however, but contented myself with maintaining a close watch upon the craft, until I was satisfied that she really was holding on for us, when I closed my glasses, returned them to the case, and leisurely made my way down to the deck again. Here I found that Purkiss had made good use of his time; the decks being clear, guns cast loose, ammunition on deck, the men at quarters with cutlasses girt to their waists, and each with a brace of revolvers in his belt, rifles loaded, and, in fact, everything quite ready for us to go into action forthwith, except that the Spaniards still hung about the deck, some peering ahead with alarmed faces at the sails of the brigantine, now rapidly rising above the horizon, while others stood about in groups regarding our preparations with astonishment and curiosity.

I now approached Señor Venadito and said that he would probably have gathered, from what he saw, that we considered there was some reason for looking upon the approaching craft with grave suspicion, and that as the

shot might perhaps be flying about the decks before long, I should be obliged if he would conduct his compatriots below, where they would be not only much safer, but also out of my men's way. Whereupon the gallant fellow at once volunteered the services of himself and his crew—thirty-two in all—to assist in the anticipated struggle, either at the guns, with the small arms, or as sail-trimmers, whichever I thought best—an offer which I unhesitatingly accepted forthwith, detailing his men to the duty of sail-trimming and handling the rifles. This little matter settled, the Spanish passengers — thirty-four in number — trundled below with great alacrity, the brigantine having by this time risen her hull above the horizon, which probably led them to suppose that the anticipated fighting would commence forthwith.

To my great astonishment, I now learned that Venadito was by no means surprised at the appearance of this questionable-looking brigantine, and upon my inquiring further he informed me that much anxiety was being felt as to the fate of several ships that had sailed out of the river Plate within the preceding six months, and were now long overdue at the ports to which they were bound, also that several long-expected inward-bound ships had never arrived, although others which had sailed about the same time had arrived safely and reported the finest of weather throughout the voyage. These unaccountable disappearances had at length given rise to a suspicion that there must be foul play enacting somewhere, and all

sorts of vague, contradictory rumours had been floating about as to ships having been sighted on fire, and so on; but nothing definite had, thus far, been ascertained.

By the time that Señor Venadito had told me all this, the brigantine had arrived within two miles of us; long before which, however, I had directed the guns to be run in and the ports closed, also that the men, with the exception of about half a dozen, should keep well out of sight by crouching low under the bulwarks. I had no fear of their being able to see in upon our decks from the brigantine, for although we were approaching her end-on, and a hand or two showed here and there aloft about her foremast, our square-sail was set, with a lower studding-sail outside it, the two together effectually screening everything abaft our foremast from the prying of curious eyes.

Presently the brigantine's royal and topgallant halliards were let go and the sails clewed up, together with the foresail, when she luffed sufficiently to show us her gaff-end clear of the leach of her topsail, and ran up the Brazilian ensign, with a pennant at her main truck. We responded by hoisting the red ensign at our peak, upon which they hoisted at their fore-royalmast-head the commercial code signal, "Heave-to; I wish to communicate."

This, of course, was all very well; but after what we had already seen, I had no notion of placing myself at a disadvantage with regard to her; I therefore gave the order for the studding-sails to be leisurely taken in and

the booms rigged in, keeping a wary eye on the brigantine meanwhile lest she should attempt to play us some ugly trick.

She was by this time within a mile of us, and we now began to get some idea of her dimensions. She sat very low in the water, and was an enormously beamy craft, which accounted for her immense spread of canvas, her square-sails being big enough for a seven-hundred-ton ship, while her gigantic mainsail made ours look, by comparison, as insignificant as a yawl's mizzen. She was painted all black, down to her copper, with bright masts, and white mastheads, top, crosstrees, yards, mainboom, and gaff; and her canvas was a perfect picture to look at, not only for the beautiful milky whiteness of it, but also for its perfect cut and set. She was pierced for nine guns of a side, including her bridle ports, and our lookout aloft now hailed to say that she had a Long Tom on her forecastle, and that her decks were crowded with men.

I regretted now that I had not had the foresight to get our own long eighteen swayed up from below and mounted; it was now, however, too late, and, after all, it really did not matter so very much, as it was my intention to fight the brigantine—if it came to that—at close quarters; not a very difficult matter in that light breeze, although I believe that had it been blowing strong she would have outsailed us sufficiently to have placed herself where she pleased with regard to us.

The Spaniards, who, under Señor Venadito, were

taking in the studding-sails, went to work in a very leisurely manner, while we continued to stand on toward the brigantine, that craft meanwhile keeping the signal flying which intimated her desire for us to heave-to. We were both moving pretty smartly through the water, and as we were approaching each other end-on, the distance between us was very rapidly diminishing. Presently the fellow on our royal-yard hailed us that the brigantine's people had loaded their long gun and were preparing to fire, upon which I directed him to come down on deck.

He was scarcely off the yard when a heavy puff of smoke burst from the brigantine's forecastle, and a round shot came humming and ricochetting across our fore-foot, within ten fathoms of it, as a tolerably plain and forcible reminder that we had not yet obeyed their signal to heave-to.

"D——n their impudence!" ejaculated Purkiss. "Do they suppose we're going to heave-to for every twopenny-halfpenny Brazilian man-o'-war that heaves in sight? Shall I return that shot, sir?"

"By no means, Purkiss," said I. "I want to get him under my lee, if he will only be fool enough to come there. Stand by to haul down that flag and run up the squadron ensign and burgee. Man the lee braces, and flatten in your sheets, fore and aft," I added in Spanish. Then to the helmsman, "Luff, and let her come up to full and by."

The brigantine luffed simultaneously with ourselves,

the double evolution placing each vessel on the lee bow of the other, while they converged upon opposite tacks, and it became a nice question which would cross the other and thus get the weather gauge. When it came to a question of "wind-jamming," however, it was soon apparent that the brigantine could do nothing with us; we brought her rapidly from our port (or lee) bow to broad abeam, crossing her at a distance of not more than a quarter of a mile. As we did so, the starboard ports were opened and the guns run out, and at the same moment the red ensign was hauled down and St. George's Cross took its place at our peak, while the Royal Yacht Squadron burgee soared to our main truck in a ball and broke abroad.

This change in the colour of our bunting seemed to rather nonpluss the brigantine, the impression produced on board her being, I believe, that we were a British man-o'-war schooner. At all events, her helm was put up, and her people rushed to the braces as though to square away before the wind; seeing which, I instantly tacked the schooner, with the intention of standing after her. While we were still in stays, however, I observed a bit of a commotion on the brigantine's quarter-deck, and presently a man rushed to the peak halliards and hauled down the Brazilian ensign, the helm was eased down, allowing the craft to come to again,—being by this time about a quarter of a mile on our lee quarter,—and then, while I was wondering what in the world they would be after on board the craft, a big black ensign floated out over her

lee taffrail and went soaring away to her peak, while her whole port broadside rattled out at us in a most confused, disorderly fashion, doing no damage, however, for the shot flew high over our mastheads.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Purkiss. "Whoever'd dream of seein' the like of that in these days, Mr. Berrington? A genu*ine* Jolly Roger, sir, all but the skull and crossbones! And yet I *ain't* surprised, arter all; for didn't I say as that there brigantine was no good? Where's he to have it, sir?"

"Aim low, and sweep his decks for him," said I. "The fellow deserves no mercy, and I'll show him none. Take careful aim, lads, and make every shot tell. Señor Venadito," I continued in Spanish, "let your men take the rifles and maintain a continuous fire upon that brigantine's decks, picking off every man they can see. You all know what she is — her flag proclaims her character—and it is our duty to make such an example of her that nobody else shall repeat the experiment she has attempted. 'No quarter' is the word for such murdering scoundrels as the crew of that ship."

"No quarter!" shouted Venadito, seizing a rifle; and "No quarter!" answered his men, following his example, and opening a smart rifle-fire upon the people that showed through the brigantine's open ports as they proceeded to reload their guns. Almost at the same moment our four nine-pounders rang out, one after the other, in a somewhat irregular but apparently very galling broadside,

for it was followed by a great outcry from the crowd that thronged the brigantine's decks, and the craft came sweeping up into the wind with her wheel shot away and all her canvas rattling and slatting in the breeze until her square-sails were flat aback.

"Hard up with your helm!" I shouted to the man at our wheel; "over with it and wear the schooner round. Hands by the head-sheets and stand by to trim them over. Load again smartly, the starboard battery, and rattle it into her bows as we cross her! She's all your own now, lads, to do what you please with her!"

The men at the starboard guns threw open the breeches of their weapons, rammed in fresh cartridges, and were ready to fire again as we swept across the bows of our adversary, plumping their shot fair and square into her as we did so; while the Spaniards who were not tending the head-sheets kept up a continuous galling rifle-fire at the men who went to the braces to box the vessel's head off. In spite of us, however, they managed to swing the brigantine's yards, and she began to pay off again; but before she could gather way we were round and lying athwart her bows once more, within biscuit-toss, with our topsail aback, when the men in the port battery poured in their broadside twice.

They were training their long gun upon us when our port broadside was fired for the first time, and as I had my binoculars bearing upon the brigantine, I was able to accurately mark the effect of it, which was truly

astonishing. The four shot seemed to crash through the brigantine's bows at one spot, making but one hole in her bulwarks, large enough, perhaps, for a man to thrust his head through, when they took effect upon the mountings of the pivot gun, capsizing the weapon, and evidently producing a shower of metallic splinters that was as good—or as bad—as a bushel of grape, for every man who was clustered about the gun went down before it, while the shot swept clean along the deck, ploughing through the crowd clustered about the guns and tending the braces aft, until it seemed as though they would clear the decks before they went out over the taffrail. With lightning rapidity the men loaded and fired again; and this time all the four shot seemed to take effect first of all in the weather fore rigging, for every shroud and backstay was severed and the whole lot swung in against the mast. The next moment I saw the unsupported spar bending under the pressure of the canvas, and then, almost before I could realise it, there came a rending crash as the whole fabric, from the deck up, swayed over to leeward, and mast, yards, and sails crashed down upon the bulwarks and went over the side, the brigantine at the same time driving astern until the whole of the wreckage hung under her bows, holding her head to wind as effectually as though she had been riding to a sea anchor.

"Now, lads, you have her; give it her hot and heavy!" shouted I; while the men, with a cheer of fierce exultation, went to work at their guns with frenzied energy;

our sheets and braces being meanwhile so tended as to keep the schooner motionless and square athwart the hawse of the brigantine. Broadside after broadside did we pour into her demolished bows, while every man who was not otherwise engaged seized a rifle—or, if there was not one available, a revolver from his belt—and deliberately potted at every head he could see over the brigantine's bulwarks, or every moving body that could be distinguished through the breaches our shot had made. And all this while not a shot did we get from the brigantine in return; for, being stem-on to us, she could only fire from her bow ports,—now battered out of recognition,—and no man could approach them for the storm of shot and rifle bullets that we maintained upon that part of the vessel.

At length, after we had been pounding at her for about twelve minutes, a man ran aft and hauled down the black flag that had been so defiantly hoisted only a short time before, and then, as we ceased firing, came forward and hailed in broken English that they surrendered.

I had declared at the commencement of the fight that I would give the pirates no quarter, but when it came to shooting them down in cold blood I found that I could not do it, nor do I believe that the crew would have gone on firing upon an unresisting foe. But we had to be careful in dealing with men part of whose trade was treachery and murder; we therefore reloaded our guns and small arms, in preparation for any emergency,

and then, filling upon the schooner, took room to wear and range up alongside the brigantine.

As we gathered way and began to draw out upon our late antagonist's port bow, Purkiss, who had been devouring the craft with his eyes, turned to me and remarked—

"Well, Mr. Berrington, sir, this is the first sea-fight as ever I've been in, and I'm astonished, sir, when I looks at the difference between the two vessels. Here are we, not a rope-yarn the worse than when we began the scrimmage, and not so much as a single scratch to show among the whole lot of us, fore and aft; why, sir, I've seen many a street row down about the Minories more serious than this! I can't understand it, Mr. Berrington, and that's a fact, 'specially when I looks at the brigantine. *She's* battered about enough, in all conscience! Look at her, there, with her bows knocked all to pieces, her foremast over the side, and—why, dash me, sir, if her scuppers ain't runnin' *blood*! Well, that beats *my* time, altogether; and she twice our size, too! And all done in a few minutes!"

"Ay," said I. "A good deal of damage may be done by sixty men in a short quarter of an hour, when they are as grimly in earnest as we have been. But, as you say, the contrast between the two vessels is something truly astonishing, although of course it arises from the difference in the behaviour of the two crews. Those fellows on board the brigantine were excellent hands, no doubt, at bullying and browbeating an unarmed and defenceless merchantman, but I have a notion that serious fighting

never entered into their calculations, and I fancy that they were very considerably astonished when they found that we could show a set of teeth as well as themselves, and were perfectly ready to use them. To my mind, they had no stomach for the fight from the outset, and would have up stick and run for it but for the man who ran aft and hoisted the black flag over their heads, thus thrusting their necks into a halter which was only to be escaped by fighting. You could judge of their consternation by the lubberly way in which they handled their guns. Then, that was a wonderfully lucky shot of ours that smashed their wheel for them and sent their ship flying up into the wind. It was that shot that practically cooked their goose for them. Now I think we may wear round. We will range up alongside on her port quarter, and when we touch, let some hands jump aboard with the end of a hawser and take a turn with it over her windlass bitts; the Spaniards had better stand by with their loaded rifles to check any attempt at treachery, and I will take a dozen hands on board with me to secure her crew."

As Purkiss turned and hurried away to attend to these matters, I found time to take a quiet look at the brigantine as she appeared with her larboard quarter presented to us, exhibiting her from an entirely new point of view.

She was evidently a Spanish-built vessel, and was a credit to the stocks on which she had been put together, wherever they might have been situate. She was a very handsome and powerful vessel, and though extra-

ordinarily beamy, a single glance at her was sufficient to convince anybody with an eye for a model that exceptional care had been taken in the draughting of her lines. She sat very low in the water, which led me to believe that she must be a shallow vessel, which, with her easy lines and enormous spread of canvas, would make her very speedy, especially in light weather; and altogether she had the look of a craft built expressly for the vile business proclaimed by her flag. She had been as handsome and rakish-looking a little clipper as one need wish to see, half an hour before; but, as Purkiss had said, it was astonishing to mark the havoc that had been wrought by our shot. She was a complete wreck forward, with her foremast and all attached hanging under her bows by the starboard shrouds and backstays, and her jibs and staysail trailing in the water from the jib-boom and bowsprit. Her bulwarks were a good deal knocked about, long strips of planking projecting out from them where our shot, entering by the bows, had come raking aft and smashing the stanchions or dashing the planking from its fastenings. But, next to her bows, the rounding of her stern seemed to have suffered most, many of our shot appearing to have traversed her deck from end to end and come out by way of the taffrail, which was jagged and splintered to pieces. And, as Purkiss had remarked, her scuppers amidships were draining blood, three of them on the port side showing a glistening perpendicular mark down the dead black of

her side with a thread of deep crimson in it which was repeated in the water that gently laved her bends. She carried two boats at her side davits, and one at her taffrail, as well as a long-boat over her main hatch, and the two last appeared to be practically knocked to pieces, but the others seemed undamaged.

Her decks looked empty compared with what they had been when she opened fire upon us, not more than twenty people being visible upon them; but this was fully accounted for when we ranged up alongside and could get a peep inside her bulwarks. She was nothing less than a floating shambles,—the dead and wounded lying about literally in heaps, especially on the forecastle, where it was evident that desperate efforts had been made to get the bow guns to bear upon us. Our nine-pound shot had proved very destructive, but it was evident enough that it had been the rifle-fire that had wrought the direst carnage, and as I ran my eye over the deck I estimated that there must be at least sixty dead and wounded men lying about it; while the light drab paint-work of the inside bulwarks, the breeches of the guns, the rammers and sponges, everything in fact, to the gear coiled upon the belaying-pins, was smeared and splashed with blood, and the decks were slippery with it.

As the yacht ranged up, head to wind, with her square canvas flat aback, upon the brigantine's quarter, and, with her way almost spent, forged slowly alongside, I sprang upon the rail, and from thence, as the sides of the two

vessels touched, on to the brigantine's deck, with a dozen of my crew at my back; upon which an immense half-caste Spanish negro, dressed in a short naval jacket, blue trousers, with a red silk sash girt about his waist, and his head bound up in a bloodstained bandage, stepped forward to meet me, proffering his sword, which he held by the point, with its hilt toward me, for my acceptance.

"The fortune of war, señor. You to-day, and I to-morrow!" said he in Spanish, with the bow of a grandee of old Spain, as I took the weapon from him.

"Rogers," said I to the mate of the schooner, who had followed me, "jump below with a couple of hands, and see that there is no trickery going on there. I have heard of this sort of gentry knocking in the head of a powder keg in the magazine and flashing a pistol into it when they have been compelled to haul down their flag. We want nothing of that kind here."

"You need fear nothing of that kind *now*, señor," remarked my friend the grandee, still in Spanish, with a smile—he evidently understood English very much better than he spoke it. "Had our captain, Don Luis, been still alive,"—he shrugged his shoulders and glanced skyward expressively,—"but he lies there," pointing aft to a spot near the wheel, "shot through the head, and of our whole crew a poor twenty are all that remain fit for duty—save the two left on board the prize."

"What brigantine is this, and where do you hail from?" asked I.



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"We call her the *Doña Theresa*, señor; and our headquarters are established in a very snug spot in the Laguna dos Patos," was the answer, with a jerk of the thumb toward the westward.

"And how long, pray, have you been cruising under the black flag?" said I.

"A trifle over nine months, señor. And we have met with nothing but good luck until now. But then Don Luis was more than a captain; he was a genius—skilful in device, bold and resolute in the execution of his plans. But he made a fatal mistake in insisting upon this last cruise. We were rich enough, and should have effected a division of our spoil, and disbanded, but for him. And now he is dead, and we"— Another expressive shrug finished the sentence.

At this moment Rogers reappeared on deck with the intelligence that all seemed right below, and that nobody was to be found there; whereupon I directed him to muster the survivors of the brigantine's crew and to send them below, with a strong guard at the hatchway, until irons could be found into which to clap the rascals. Then, returning on board the schooner, I proposed to Venadito that he should put a gang of twenty of his men on board the brigantine to rig up a jury foremast and keep a watch upon the prisoners, while we ran down to the captured ship—which, strangely enough, had remained hove-to all this while—and took possession of her, when he could take both craft, if necessary, with the

surviving passengers of the *Medina Sidonia*, into Monte Video, which would leave me free to prosecute my voyage in pursuit of the *Olga*. This arrangement suited him admirably—he frankly explaining to me that by taking in the brigantine he would be certain to gain a large share of the credit due to her capture, which would doubtless prove of material assistance in securing him another berth. The needful arrangements, including the secure confinement of the prisoners in irons, were soon completed, and leaving twenty of the Spanish crew on board the brigantine, with instructions to make the best job they could of a jury rig for her, but on no account to leave the spot they then occupied until rejoined by Venadito in the ship, we cast off and headed away for the prize, just as the sun reached the western horizon.

CHAPTER XII

THE *PARAMATTA* AND THE *LUCY MITCHELL*

IT was a superb evening; the sky clear as glass, with only a few small fine-weather clouds, purple and crimson and purest gold, floating above the setting sun, with the sea gently ruffled by a tender breeze, as we bore away for the distant ship. But it was quite dark when we reached her—as dark as it would be, that is to say; for, although the moon would not rise until nearly midnight, the sky was now without a trace of cloud, and the whole firmament was brilliant with innumerable stars, the soft lustre of which made the night clear enough to distinctly reveal the object for which we were steering.

As we floated down to her, we made her out to be a craft of close upon fourteen hundred tons, hove-to on the port tack, with her main-topsail to the mast, and her head to the northward. We could see that her saloon was lighted up, for the radiance streamed out from her sky-lights upon the starlit darkness; but the dead silence that reigned on board her, and the utter absence of figures from her deck, together with her motionless atti-

tude, were full of sinister suggestion, although we knew, of course, that if the pirates had only left two men on board her—as had been said—they would not be likely to leave her crew at liberty; and we concluded that we should find them, probably lashed hand and foot, in the forecastle, with the hatch secured over them.

As, however, we slid close under her stern, with our topsail aback, a solitary figure at her taffrail stood up black against the starlight, evidently regarding us curiously.

Purkiss at once hailed him.

"Ship ahoy! what ship is that?"

"The *Paramatta*, of London, homeward bound from Sydney and Dunedin. What schooner is that?"

"The *Evangeline*, Royal Yacht Squadron, from Cowes to the Pacific. You've had some disagreeable visitors this a'ternoon, haven't you?"

"Yes. For God's sake come aboard," answered the man, his voice rising almost to a scream with the terror and excitement he seemed to be labouring under. "There have been *awful* doings aboard here—the crew and all the male passengers murdered in cold blood, and only the women and myself left. The ladies are pretty nigh out of their senses,—one of them is *quite* mad,—and I don't know what to do."

"My God! what an awful business!" muttered Purkiss to me. Then, "All right, we'll come aboard you," shouted he, as the yacht rounded-to on the ship's weather quarter.

"Go into the cabin and tell the ladies that an English yacht is alongside; it'll hearten 'em up a bit."

The man waved his hand in token of assent, and then we saw him run along the poop and disappear down one of the ladders leading to the quarter-deck.

The gig was lowered, and with eight men in her I pulled alongside the ship, which loomed in the starlight to a craft of twice her dimensions. She was an iron ship, and very deep in the water, but for which latter fact we should have found some difficulty in boarding her, as the man who had answered our hail was now nowhere to be seen,—he had probably gone straight to the saloon with Purkiss's message,—and there was not so much as a rope's end hanging over the side to help us. However, we climbed on board by way of the main channels, and, scrambling in over the high bulwarks, found ourselves on a very spacious deck, which seemed to stretch away forward to a distance of nearly twice the length of the schooner. The massive mainmast, with its towering height and spread of top-hamper soaring away in a black shadow overhead against the stars, pierced the deck abreast of us; and forward of it there was the main hatch with the long-boat stowed over it, and another boat, bottom-up, inside her. Forward of the long-boat was a deck-house which probably contained the galley and the quarters of the boatswain, sailmaker, cook, and stewards; and forward of that, again, was the foremast, with all its canvas set—except the fore course, which was hauled up

—and straining gently at the yards, stays, and sheets, in the softly-murmuring night breeze. All the dimensions of this noble ship—her length, her breadth, the bulk and altitude of her masts and their distance apart, the spread of her massive yards, and the spacious heights of her towering canvas—appeared almost gigantic after what we were accustomed to on board the schooner, and I can tell you that it seemed an experience strange and unreal almost past belief to leap down upon that roomy deck and cast one's eyes fore and aft without finding one single animate thing upon them.

As I turned aft to enter the saloon I suddenly remembered that the mulatto on board the brigantine had said that two of that vessel's crew had been left on board the prize, and I wondered vaguely where they had bestowed themselves, and why the man on the poop had said nothing about them. As I reached the open door in the cuddy front, under the overhang of the poop, this person reappeared from the cabin, and, seeing me, exclaimed—

"Come in, sir, and say something to soothe the ladies, for God's sake! They've heard you coming aboard, and I can't persuade 'em but what it's the pirates come back."

"Are you one of the crew of this ship?" I demanded.

"Yes, sir; I'm the second steward," he answered.

"Then how comes it that you have contrived to escape the general massacre?" said I.

"Well, sir, it's this way, you see. When it was found

that we couldn't escape the brigantine, Captain Munroe—that was our unfortunate skipper, you know, sir—he called a council of all the men passengers, and asked 'em whether we should stand on and take our chance of being able to keep the pirates from boarding when they laid their ship alongside of us, or whether we should heave-to and let 'em come aboard quietly, trusting to their taking what they wanted and going away peaceably again. There was a lot of talk about it, some being for one plan, and some for the other; but when at last the question was put by somebody what weapons we had aboard, it turned out that there was only one brace of revolvers in the ship; so, as they wasn't considered enough, it was decided to heave the ship to, and trust to the pirates' humanity. Well, sir, this was done, and the villains swarmed aboard—three boat-loads of 'em—armed to the teeth, as the saying is; and when I looked over the side and saw what they looked like, I admired 'em so little that I slipped across to the other side of the deck and climbed over the gunwale of the long-boat into the jolly-boat, where I stowed myself away on top of a lot of oars and things that was stowed on her thwarts, where I hoped nobody would ever dream of searching.

"I'd hardly got myself laid flat down and well out o' sight, when the pirates—a lot of blasted half-caste niggers they were—swarmed aboard, and they'd no sooner got possession of the deck than they began firing right and left at our people—one of the bullets passing through the

jolly-boat's planking and missing my head by about half an inch; and then for the next ten minutes there was the awfullest hullabaloo that ever you heard, pistols firing, men screaming and groaning and shouting, our chaps cussing and swearing as they rushed for handspikes, belaying-pins, and anything they could lay hands upon, and the sounds of heavy blows being struck—well, there, *I* couldn't describe it, sir. Some of our lads took to the rigging, but it wasn't no good; the niggers just potted at 'em with their pistols, and one after another they came tumbling to the deck, dead or wounded, and as fast as they fell they was picked up and hove over the rail into the sea. In about ten minutes it was all over, and everybody but me and the ladies killed and tossed overboard. Then, instead of plundering the ship, as I expected they would, the whole crowd of 'em tumbled over the side into their boats again—except two—and pulled away for the brigantine as fast as they could; and as soon as they got aboard, the yards was swung, and away they went, steering for a sail that was just showing above the horizon away to the nor'ard.

"The two that was left behind went on to the poop and stood there laughing and talking and shouting to the brigantine until she ran out of earshot, and then they came down again and went into the saloon. I could tell pretty well what was going on by putting my eye to the bullet-hole in the boat's planking, and as soon as the two niggers disappeared into the saloon I slipped out of my

hiding-place, and was going for'ard with the idea of stowing myself away down in the fore peak, when I heard the awfullest screaming in the saloon; and thinks I, 'There's some devilment going on in there that ought not to be,' and with that I snatches a brass belaying-pin out of the rail, and rushes in. When I got in, sir, there was these two filthy niggers struggling with two of the lady passengers,—Miss Saunders and Miss Maitland,—trying to drag them into one of the berths, while all the other ladies was lending a hand to resist 'em. I ups with my belaying-pin at once and brings it smack down upon the skull of the man nearest me,—the chap that had got hold of Miss Saunders,—and though I've always heard that niggers has got thick skulls, I hit this chap such a whack that he let go the young lady and dropped to the floor as though I'd shot him. Just as I'd done this, there was a dreadful shriek, and the screaming grew worse than ever; and, looking up from the man I'd floored, there was Miss Maitland, with her eyes all ablaze, blood upon her hand and the sleeve and front of her white dress, and the man that had had hold of her falling backwards with his hands in the air and a dagger that Miss Maitland had snatched out of his belt sticking into his breast.

"The sight of the blood, and the two men lying there on the carpet, seemed to drive the women-folks crazy altogether, and the way they carried on, sir, was fit to frighten you; so, hoping to quiet 'em a bit, I dragged first one and then the other of the niggers out on deck and

launched 'em overboard, dead or alive I don't know which, and soon after I'd done this I heard the sounds of firing in the distance, and shinning up as far as the mizzen top, I saw that the brigantine and your schooner was having a set-to; and I stayed there until I saw the brigantine's foremast go over the side and her flag come down, when I went into the cabin and told the ladies that the pirates had just had a thrashing and that we'd nothing more to fear from 'em. But they didn't believe me, sir, and don't to this minute. So will you please step in and tell 'em that they're all right, sir?"

"Certainly," said I. "Lead the way, if you please."

I followed the steward along a short passage, at the end of which was a door. This door the man flung open, disclosing a partial view of a very elegant and brilliantly lighted cuddy or saloon, with several women standing about in attitudes of the most lively alarm and apprehension, their eyes wide and brilliant with terror, their bosoms heaving, and hands clasped together, or convulsively clutching the backs of the seats from which they had sprung upon the opening of the door.

"Ladies," said I, bowing as I entered the apartment, "the steward here has just told me the story of your dreadful adventure, and I have the happiness to inform you that, so far as the pirates are concerned, you have nothing more to fear. After leaving this ship, they attacked my yacht, and we gave them so sound a thrashing that they were at last glad to haul down their colours

and surrender. The pirates are now safe in irons, and their vessel in possession of part of the survivors of the crew of a Spanish steamer that foundered last Sunday morning; and now I propose that the remainder of the Spanish crew shall take charge of this ship and carry her into Monte Video, where the British Consul will make all necessary arrangements for equipping her with a fresh crew to take her to her destination."

"Are you absolutely certain, sir, that it is out of the power of the pirates to do us further harm?" demanded a slight, white-haired lady, who stood at the far end of the cabin, with a girl on each side of her — evidently her daughters—whom she grasped tightly by the hand, as though to hold them back from some imminent danger.

"As certain as I can be of anything," I replied. "There are but twenty of them who have escaped our shot, and they are ironed, hand and foot, in the hold of their own vessel, which, as I have already said, is in possession of a party of Spanish seamen. They are as harmless now as though they were already hanged—which they will doubtless be without delay as soon as they fall into the hands of the authorities ashore; while as for yourselves, your ship will be in Monte Video in a few days, where you will be able to make whatever new arrangements you please."

The lady whom I more particularly addressed bowed with the grace of a duchess in acknowledgment of my communication, and then, suddenly placing her hands

to her face, she shuddered violently, as she exclaimed wailingly—

"Oh, this has been a dreadful, *dreadful* experience! There are no less than five of us here who have lost our husbands, while some of us have lost sons as well. O God, my two poor boys! can it be *true* that they are *dead*?"

Her voice rose to a scream, and she glared round the cabin wildly, with the look of some terrible purpose in her face, as she sought to shake herself free from the grasp of her sobbing daughters, who with difficulty constrained her to reseat herself upon the sofa from which she had risen. A heartrending wail burst from the lips of several of the other occupants of the cabin as this poor, cruelly-bereaved lady spoke of the loss of their husbands; and in the midst of it an awful, maniacal laugh burst forth, as a most lovely girl sprang to her feet, and with blazing eyes and outstretched bloodstained hands confronted me, demanding—

"Why did you not come before? Of what use is your presence to us *now*? Can you restore our dead? Can you give us back our lost ones? Can you cleanse these polluted hands, or purge my soul of the foul crime of *murder*? Yes, look at me; I am Adela Maitland, the murderess! I have slain a man, and sent his guilty soul all unprepared to meet its Maker! Why could you not have come in time to save us all from these unspeakable horrors? O God, have mercy upon me and let me forget my crime, or I shall go mad!—*mad!*—MAD!"

The unhappy girl pronounced the last words with a rapidly rising inflection of voice that ended in a dreadful yell, more awful than any sound that I have ever yet heard issue from human lips, and then dashed herself upon her knees on the deck, with her lovely but distorted features buried in her hands, while a perfect tempest of dry, tearless sobs burst from her labouring breast. Poor soul! it was pitiful past all expression to see a young girl brought to this condition by the horrors through which she had just passed, for she was undoubtedly a maniac, and, for aught that I could tell, hopelessly so. Then there was the grief and horror of the others at the loss of their relatives, friends, and acquaintance by the barbarous, wholesale, cold-blooded murder that had been perpetrated, if not actually before their eyes, at least within their hearing, only a few hours previously, to render that handsome cabin a perfect place of wailing, a scene of sorrow and despair for which no words of mine could afford the smallest grain of comfort or alleviation; I was therefore glad enough to get out on deck again, and hasten forward the arrangements for re-manning the *Paramatta*, and transferring to her the survivors from the *Medina Sidonia* prior to sending her into Monte Video. This did not occupy much time, as the Spaniards had no baggage to pack; while, therefore, they were being transhipped, I employed myself in the preparation of a deposition setting forth all the facts of the case against the pirates, which document, duly signed and attested,

I delivered to Venadito to be handed to the proper authorities upon his arrival in port. By the time that this document was completed, the Spaniards were ready to fill away upon the *Paramatta*; I therefore bade everybody on board her farewell, expressed an earnest hope that the ship would reach her destination without further misadventure, and made the best of my way back to the schooner, glad to get away from so much misery, that nothing I could do, no sympathy that I could express, could in the smallest degree alleviate. There was nothing to detain us longer in that accursed spot, so the helm was at once put up, and we filled away upon our course.

About ten o'clock that night the wind hauled round from the west-north-west, and breezed up strongly enough to compel us to furl the royal, continuing thus all through the night, so that when I went on deck the next morning to take my usual look round before breakfast, I found the schooner foaming along under her topgallantsail, set over a single-reefed topsail, with flying jib stowed, braces checked, and her big square-sail spread to the breeze that came swooping down upon our starboard beam with something of the sound and bluster of a gale in it. The pale blue wind-flecked sky was full of big round-bodied clouds sailing swiftly across it; the sea was a windy green, with plenty of white foam about the curling crests, and the schooner was sweeping through it like a mad thing, with her lee channels buried, and the froth boiling and swirling out from under her lee bow and

along her side as from the paddles of a steamer. All through that day and night, and up to noon of the next day, this glorious breeze continued to blow; placing us at noon of October 4th in lat. 37° 30′ S., long. 44° 18′ W. Then it began to moderate, and by four bells in the afternoon watch our speed had dwindled to a bare eight knots.

At this hour a sail ahead was reported from the royal-yard, and in due time she hove up above the horizon into view from the deck. When about two miles distant, she hove-to—showing herself to be a small brig, of about two hundred and thirty tons, very deep in the water—and hoisted the British ensign, union down, at her gaff.

"Why, Purkiss," said I, "it would almost appear as though our mission in these seas is to assist vessels in distress! Now, what will be the matter with that brig?"

"Blest if I know, sir," was the answer. "She floats deep, it's true, but not deep enough to hint at there bein' anything wrong with her hull. Besides, their pumps ain't at work; there's no water coming out of her scuppers. Perhaps there's been an accident aboard, and they're in hopes of gettin' medical assistance."

"Possibly," said I. "We shall soon see."

We had answered the signal of distress by hoisting our ensign, but there was no attempt at a further communication on the part of the brig; we therefore stood on until we reached her, when we rounded-to under her stern. As we did so, half a dozen figures appeared at her taffrail and began to gesticulate violently, putting their hands up

to the side of their mouths and going through all the motions of hailing, with delirious eagerness and energy, but without giving utterance to a sound. This was followed by a gesture eloquent of despair, and a pointing with their fingers to their mouths, after which they went through the pantomime of drinking.

"That will be it, Mr. Berrington, sir," exclaimed Purkiss, as he waved his hand in token that we understood; "they'll be short of water."

"If that is so," said I, "we must be careful what we are about, or we may do a great deal more harm than good. You had better have a small breaker of water put into the gig for their immediate necessities, with a couple of bottles of brandy, in case they should be required, and I will go on board and see what is actually the matter."

In less than five minutes we were alongside the craft, when two of the gig's crew sprang on deck, I following them, to find myself instantly surrounded by the six individuals who had previously shown themselves at the brig's taffrail. I shall never forget the dreadful sight these poor creatures presented as they crowded round me. They were thin as skeletons; indeed, I cannot describe them better than by saying that they exactly resembled animated skeletons over whose bones a dry, cracked, yellow skin had been so tightly stretched that the joints and protruding cheek-bones seemed to be upon the point of bursting through. Their eyes were ablaze with fever; but it was their dry, cracked lips and the peculiar, horrible

fetor of their breath—which I knew well, having met with it before—that told me better even than their dry, husky whispers for "water" what was the matter. They were slowly perishing of thirst. The breaker of water was quickly passed up out of the boat; but it required the united exertions of three of my gig's crew to prevent them from seizing it and killing themselves straight off by drinking too much after their long abstinence. The neck of a bottle of brandy was knocked off, and about a teaspoonful of the spirit was added to a gill of water and served out to each man, in the first instance; and it was dreadfully indicative of the frightful agony of their suffering to see the state of frenzy excited in the poor creatures by the mere gurgling sound of the water as it issued from the bunghole of the breaker, and to watch the wolf-like glare with which the first drinker was regarded by his companions. It was with the utmost difficulty that I succeeded in restraining the man from gulping down the mixture at a draught, and I shall never forget the expression with which, when the last drop had been drained from the pannikin, he raised his eyes to heaven and ejaculated hoarsely—

"O my God! I have been in hell, and now I know what heaven is like!"

I gave these six men a single draught each all round, and then repeated it, and it was marvellous to see how rapidly their strength came back to them, and how quickly they recovered their power of speech; the effect of that

half-pint of liquid upon them seemed nothing short of magical. Having relieved them of their sharpest agony, I asked them if there were any more people on board, and was horrified to learn that there were no less than thirteen other sufferers in the ship, nine of whom had been taken out of an open boat two days before. It was a very delicate business to administer the first draught to some of these poor wretches without extinguishing the last lingering spark of life in them, for when at length I had gone through the ship and had succeeded in reviving them all, I found that the nine men who had been taken out of the open boat had been no less than *eight* days without water, while the others—the crew of the brig—had consumed their last drop of liquid five days before the date on which we fell in with them. What the sufferings of these unfortunates had been it would probably surpass the power of human tongue to tell, and there was certainly not one of *them* who could find language adequate to its expression.

The brig was named the *Lucy Mitchell*, and was bound home from Mauritius to London. It appeared that she had encountered very heavy weather coming round the Cape, and it was supposed by those on board her that the working and straining of the hull on that occasion had in some incomprehensible manner caused her water tanks to leak; at all events, it happened that when, a week previously, the boy who acted as steward on board shipped the pump to draw the day's supply of water

from the tank, none was forthcoming, and an immediate examination of the tanks led to the disagreeable discovery that their contents had drained completely away. To add to their misery, the scuttle butt also was practically empty, and the unfortunate crew thus found themselves in the middle of the South Atlantic with only a few pints of water between them and a lingering, painful death. Under these circumstances, the captain—who, to still further complicate matters, was suffering from a low fever—headed the vessel for the American coast, hoping to fall in with something bound round the Horn, from which he could obtain a sufficient supply of water to carry him on until he could reach a port, instead of which they had picked up a boat containing nine men, forming part of the crew of a barque named the *Wanderer*, bound from Swansea to Valparaiso with coal, which had been burnt at sea. These unfortunates, when picked up, had already been enduring the agonies of thirst for six days, and the first use they made of their recovered powers of speech was to heap deep and bitter curses upon the crew of a schooner that had passed them within half a mile five days before, utterly disregarding their signals of distress and their frantic efforts to get alongside her. I naturally pricked up my ears upon hearing of this schooner, and at once began to question the rescued men about her, with the result that no doubt was left upon my mind as to her being the *Olga*. This piece of news satisfied me that we were still hanging fair in that

accursed vessel's wake; but from the somewhat confused account of the brig's captain as to the position of the boat when picked up, and the distance sailed by the brig since then, it appeared that the Russian had rather increased her distance from us, being now, according to my calculations, about six days ahead. However, it was comforting to know that we were following her as truly as a sleuth-hound does his prey, and her position when last seen clearly indicated that the comtesse still adhered to her resolution of attempting the passage of the Straits, within which we might hope to overhaul them, should they loiter to enjoy the scenery.

I remained on board the *Lucy Mitchell* until the people on board her had so far recovered their strength as to be able to take care of themselves, and then, having given them enough water to carry them to the coast, set the chronometer—which, through the skipper's prostration, had been allowed to run down—and given them their latitude and longitude, I bade them adieu and God-speed, and returned to the schooner, it being then close upon eight bells of the second dog watch.

CHAPTER XIII

IN MAGELLAN STRAITS, WITH THE CHASE IN SIGHT

AN uneventful week now followed, during which we were favoured with moderate breezes that permitted us to lay our course and make good progress, with fine bright weather, and a temperature that gradually became more bracing as the yacht sped on her way to the southward.

On the 10th of October, at noon, we hove-to for a cast of the lead, and struck soundings in sixty-five fathoms, thus accurately confirming our reckoning up to this point; and on the following morning, at daybreak, land was made ahead—a high bluff—which turned out to be Cape Virgins, at the entrance to the Straits of Magellan. We were abreast it, and rounding the low sand spit named Dungeness at 10 a.m., when we might be said to be fairly in the mouth of the Straits. The wind now came down strong from the north-west, off the Patagonian shore, compelling us to furl the royal and topgallantsail, but we kept well up under the weather shore, in the smooth water, making alternately a "long leg and a short leg"

to windward, and the schooner thrashed along like a mad thing under the influence of the piping breeze and a strong weather-going tide until we reached Possession Bay, when we bore away upon a southerly course through the first and second Narrows to St. Philip's Bay, where, the moon being only two days old, we anchored for the night, the navigation ahead being of a far too difficult character to be attempted in the darkness. I had heard a good deal about the grandeur of the scenery in the Straits of Magellan, but I am compelled to admit that what I saw of it on that first day by no means impressed me, the Patagonian shore being low and sandy, with no vegetation upon it except dwarf, wind-swept scrub—a most dreary and uninteresting landscape; while the opposite coast of Tierra del Fuego, though rugged and mountainous, presented little of the picturesque save such as was of a wild, gloomy, and forbidding character.

At six o'clock on the following morning we weighed and proceeded, with a strong northerly wind, bitterly cold, an overcast sky, and occasional rain showers, arriving at Sandy Point about nine o'clock a.m. There is a Chilian settlement here, and what the inhabitants are pleased to call a *town*—a wretched assemblage of log huts, built in square blocks, with wide roads between, the inhabitants numbering about a thousand. There was a British Vice-Consul there, however, and as I was rather anxious to see him, we entered the harbour with

our white ensign at the peak and the squadron burgee at our masthead, and came to an anchor.

Our ensign evidently conveyed the impression ashore that we were a Government craft of some kind, for before our canvas was furled we saw a boat-load of people shove off and head toward us from the rickety wooden jetty, with the red and white ensign of Chili snapping over their heads in the fierce breeze that came sweeping across the forest-clad plain; and, when, shortly afterwards, the boat dashed up to our gangway, and her occupants stepped in on deck, they proved to be the governor of the place, three of the officers belonging to the garrison, the British Vice-Consul, and the harbourmaster, all come off to pay their respects. They were somewhat astonished, but by no means disconcerted, when they discovered that the *Evangeline* was a yacht, our guns rather puzzling them — the Chilians, at least, who seemed to find a difficulty in understanding, in the first instance, that any man should undertake a sea voyage for pleasure, and secondly, that, having done so, he should voluntarily visit localities of so dangerous a character as to render guns a necessary part of the ship's equipment.

"You will have to be very careful when you get into English Reach, that you don't come to grief there, or you may find that you will need those guns," remarked the consul. "The navigation of that part of the Straits is exceedingly intricate and dangerous, and should you

get ashore you will have the natives swarming round you in a jiffy if they think there is any chance of being able to plunder the ship."

I thanked him for his warning, and then informed him that I had put in for fresh supplies, and especially to renew my stock of water, when he promised that he would see what could be done in the matter, although he feared that, with the exception of water, beef, eggs, and a small supply of poultry, there was not much to be had in the place. The party having accepted my invitation to breakfast, a note touching the supplies was sent ashore by the boat, and we all went below. While we were all busily discussing our meal, I took occasion to ask if any vessels had passed lately, bound to the westward, and, to my surprise and delight, was informed that a very handsome schooner, about the same size as the *Evangeline*, and flying Russian colours, had passed up Famine Reach only the morning before, and a few further inquiries served to satisfy me, almost beyond all possible doubt, that the vessel must be the *Olga*, upon which we had thus gained until she was only a bare twenty-four hours ahead of us. This conclusion, however, was founded only on supposition from the description of the craft, for she had not touched at Sandy Point, or even reported herself, merely hoisting the Russian ensign as she passed.

This news threw me into a perfect fever of impatience to be off again, so that we might overhaul the *Olga* before

she should clear the Straits and become lost to us in the Pacific, and I would have lifted the anchor there and then had it not been that our water tanks were by this time so nearly empty that it would have been worse than imprudent to neglect the opportunity we then had to refill them; but my impatience was somewhat appeased by the information that the schooner, when seen, was under very easy sail, and evidently feeling her way cautiously as she went. When I remarked that, from the description of the schooner, I believed that I knew her, and should like to ascertain whether my supposition as to her identity was correct, the harbourmaster confidently assured me that I should have no difficulty whatever about overtaking her in English Reach, along which she would be certain to proceed with extreme caution, owing to the difficulties of the navigation, and in order to ensure my doing so he offered to procure me a pilot well acquainted with the navigation, so that we might be able to push on rapidly and with full confidence. This offer I most gladly accepted; for although I was confident of my own ability to take the schooner safely through the Straits, with the assistance of the excellent chart and book of directions in my possession, I concluded that we should be able to make much better progress under the guidance of a skilled pilot than would be possible if left to grope our way through by the chart and the lead.

My visitors lingered long on board the yacht, admiring

the dainty fittings and furnishing of her saloons and staterooms, and, even more, the handsome guns with which she was armed, and the magazine rifles with which we were plentifully provided; but at length they bade me good-bye and pulled away ashore again; and very soon afterwards down came our supplies, such as they were; the tanks were filled, and everything was ready for a fresh start, except that the promised pilot had not turned up. We waited a full hour for him, and I had already given orders to get the anchor, determined not to wait any longer, when off he came, a dirty half-breed, clad in leather and wrapped in an ostrich-skin rug, with a knowledge of English limited to the words, "port, starboard, steady; now eat, now sleep."

It was by this time nearly three o'clock in the afternoon; but the northerly wind still held and blew strongly, so away we went up Famine Reach under every rag that the yacht could stagger under, including studding-sails on both sides, the dangers here being comparatively few and the waterway wide enough to permit of their being easily avoided. We carried on until seven o'clock that evening, by which time we had run to practically the end of Famine Reach, anchoring for the night in a deep but tolerably snug bay on the Fuegian shore, where we witnessed for the first time an exhibition of the native custom from which the country derives its name, our anchor being scarcely down when at least a dozen signal fires were kindled at different points along the beach. Everything

was at once made ready for a possible attack, and the anchor watches were doubled; but no canoes were seen, and the night passed in perfect quiet.

Starting again at six o'clock next morning, with a roaring northerly breeze sweeping down from the Patagonian shore, a gloomy, overcast sky to windward, and in the midst of a cold, pelting rain that drove along almost horizontally upon the wings of the blast, and stung our faces as though they were being slashed by a whip, we rounded Cape Froward, and braced up for the passage through Froward Reach just as the steward came on deck to inform me that breakfast was ready.

Cape Froward is the most southerly point of the Brunswick Peninsula, and therefore of the mainland of South America. It is a noble headland, and in fine clear weather the view from abreast it along Famine Reach, with the snow-covered mountains in the background, must be very fine; but we lost it all in the thick, rainy weather that interposed between us and it. By the way, it seems to me a very great pity that the Chilians do not employ their convicts at Sandy Point to convert the Brunswick Peninsula into an island, by cutting a canal through the isthmus, which at its narrowest part is stated to be only about three miles wide. This canal, and another of about the same length connecting Skyringe Water with the western extremity of Magellan Straits, would shorten the passage fully sixty miles, besides creating a new route

free from the many dangers that obstruct English Reach.

At a little before noon the wind lulled and shifted, coming out a gentle but bitterly keen breeze from east-south-east; the rain cleared away, the sun broke through and scattered the clouds, and we found ourselves in the midst of noble scenery, consisting of a foreground of dense, luxuriant forest vegetation reaching in many cases right down to the water's edge, interspersed with out-crops of gigantic granite boulders, over which frothed silvery waterfalls, with a background of superb snow-clad mountains and noble glaciers glistening, gem-like, in the clear, brilliant sunshine. We also found ourselves entering upon the most dangerous stretch of navigation in the Straits, namely, English Reach, where the channel narrows down to an average width of not more than three miles from shore to shore, and is encumbered with numerous small islands, rocks, and shoals, some of which are sunk beneath the surface deeply enough to give no warning of their whereabouts in fine weather when the water is smooth, but are not sunk deep enough to allow of any but exceedingly light-draught vessels to pass over them. It became necessary to proceed with all due caution here; therefore, although the wind had softened down to a gentle breeze, we kept the schooner under her topsail only and whole mainsail, under which, with the wind almost dead aft, she slipped along through the water at a speed of about six knots.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and we had safely negotiated what we considered as the most dangerous part of the channel, when a sudden hail from the lookout aloft directed our attention ahead, and we saw the canvas of a small craft, gleaming snowy white against the dark background of forest and rock, stealing out clear of a bold point on our port bow. The vessel was about twelve miles distant, and only the heads of her lower sails were visible from the deck, but a single glance at her through our glasses sufficed to satisfy us that she was a schooner of about our own size.

"The *Olga* at last, for a thousand!" I exclaimed exultantly, as the delicate, jauntily raking spars and the exquisitely and unmistakably yachting cut of the sails showed through the lenses of my binoculars.

"Ay, sir," answered Purkiss, peering through the schooner's telescope, "I allow it 'd be safe to wager all Lombard Street against a Chin*ee* orange upon that; if ever I've seen a yacht's canvas, I see it now. But it's a question that's easily settled; I'd swear to her hull as far as I could see her."

Slinging the telescope by its straps over his shoulder, he walked forward, and, swinging himself into the fore rigging, clawed his way up as far as the crosstrees, in which he comfortably settled himself, prior to bringing the glass to bear upon the sail ahead. Then, raising the instrument to his eye, he took a prolonged and exhaustive squint, a good five minutes' inspection of

her, during which he doubtless noted every peculiarity, even to the minutest distinguishable, of her shape and equipment, at the end of which he clashed the tubes into each other with a decisiveness of action that there was no mistaking, and came down the rigging with that deliberation which is so characteristic of the merchant seaman.

"It's *her*, Mr. Berrington, sir!" he exclaimed, with ill-repressed excitement, as he walked to the companion and replaced the instrument in its brackets; "it's the *Holger*, or her twin sister, sir, which last ain't likely, seein' that, in the first place, I've never heard that she *had* a twin sister, and in the next place, if she *had*, I don't suppose the both of 'em 'd be at all likely to be in this out-o'-the-way spot, within a few mile of one another, at this identical time. No, sir, it's the *Holger* herself, or I'm a Dutchman—which I ain't, by a long ways, seein' that I was born in the town of Gosport!"

"Make sail, Purkiss," said I. "Pack upon her every rag you can show to it. We have only three hours more daylight, and we must catch her before it gets dark, or she may give us the slip."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Purkiss. "All hands make sail! Jump aloft a couple of hands to loose the royal and to'gallantsail. Lay aloft some of ye, and rig out the larboard stunsail-booms and reeve the gear. Rouse out your square-sail there, my lads, and get it set. Let go them roy'l and to'gallant clewlines, you Jim. Loose the flyin' jib, and stand by to h'ist away. Cast the lashin' off

that gaff-foresail, and man your peak and throat halliards. To'gallant-yard, there, just cast loose that main-topmast staysail as you come down, will ye? Now, lads, look alive with that gaff-topsail there—the jack-yarder, not the working topsail, you sojers; come along here with the halliards and bend 'em on; now, then, where's the sheet? Are you all ready? Then h'ist away!"

It had long before become known to the inmates of the forecastle that we were in pursuit of another vessel; indeed, the constant lookout aloft that had been maintained for so long a time would alone have proclaimed to them the fact, had it not leaked out in any other way, and now it needed no more than the keen interest aroused by the sudden appearance of the schooner ahead, and the excitement of Purkiss as he issued his orders to pack the schooner with canvas, to make the men know that the long-looked-for chase was in sight—the result of which was that they skipped about the decks like so many cats before a shower of rain, and worked with such celerity and goodwill that in an incredibly brief space of time the *Evangeline* was sweeping along the gently ruffled surface of the sheltered water like a wreath of summer mist, under a spread of canvas so lofty and spacious that it might well have puzzled the unsophisticated natives, who doubtless watched her from their lurking-places ashore, to understand how the small white hull could possibly sustain it.

The westering sun shone full upon our cloths, bleached

to the whiteness of immaculate snow by our passage through the tropics, and brightened them to a complexion of golden radiance, in vivid contrast to the dark background of rock and sombre foliage amid which we were sailing, which could not fail to quickly attract the notice of those on board the *Olga*, and that this was so soon became manifest from the fact that her crew began to bestir themselves to increase their own spread of canvas. There was nothing particularly suspicious in this act of theirs; it probably meant no more than that, seeing a vessel coming up with them, hand over hand, and making the most of a favouring breeze, it had dawned upon their skipper that he might as well do the same, or the man having under his feet a vessel holding a certain reputation for speed, may have possessed enough professional pride to render him unwilling to be overtaken and passed by anything of about his own size; he was only acting as almost any other man would under the circumstances,—for the spirit of emulation is exceedingly strong among sailors, as a class, and especially so among yachtsmen,—yet I seemed to see in it the evidence of a guilty conscience, and the betrayal of an invincible determination to avoid the approach within hail of another craft, resulting, perhaps, in the discovery of certain awkward facts, if not an appeal for rescue and protection on the part of one of his passengers. As I thought of this, a thrill of almost overpowering eagerness and excitement swept over me, and I inwardly vowed that I would have my poor imprisoned

darling out of that accursed vessel that night, even though I should be compelled to run the craft aboard and carry her by force of arms in order to effect my object. Then I fell to wondering whether, as the distance lessened between the two schooners—for we had been overhauling the *Olga* very rapidly before they thought of bestirring themselves to make sail on board her, and continued to do so at a scarcely less speed for some time afterwards, in consequence of the dilatory style of working on board the Russian, so that by four bells in the dog watch we had raised her to her rail—I began to wonder, I say, whether Eva—who would doubtless be aware of our presence astern and our rapid approach—would entertain any suspicion as to the identity of the flying white phantom in pursuit with that of the yacht named after her and built for her delectation. She had never seen the vessel, certainly, but she had seen photographs of her taken both at anchor and under sail, and I was willing to hope that our great spread of canvas and gleaming white hull, seen even at a distance of some seven miles, might prove sufficiently suggestive to awaken within her the suspicion that I had succeeded in fathoming the mystery of her abduction, and had started in pursuit. I would willingly have increased the suggestiveness of our appearance by hoisting our ensign and burgee, but that would have only too probably aroused the suspicions of the comtesse, who knew me to be a member of the Royal Yacht Squadron, and who knew also the colours of the squadron, whereas

if I showed no colours, she and her crew might see in the schooner nothing more than a vessel anxious to make the most of the daylight. Then—and not until then, for the first time since the commencement of the voyage—a thought occurred to me that, for an instant, affected me as with the sickness of a deadly vertigo, so pregnant was it with suggestions of possible failure, complete, unmitigable, of overwhelming horror and irretrievable disaster. What if my lost love were *not* on board the *Olga*, and had never been there? What if Mapleson's alleged discoveries had all been nothing but a series of misleading fiendishly plausible coincidences, enticing me away to the farthest extremity of the globe upon a chase utterly fruitless, and, infinitely worse still, consuming so much priceless time as to render any search for the lost one in other directions absolutely hopeless? Should that prove to be the case, then my poor darling was lost indeed for ever, so far as rescue was concerned! The idea was maddening, and my brain reeled with the immeasurable horror of it, until memory again recalled the indisputable clue of the pocket-handkerchief found on board the steam launch at Gravesend—a piece of evidence which of itself was sufficient, one would say, to completely establish the identity of the abducted person with that of the owner.

Then there was another thought that persistently recurred to me from time to time. What if the "accident" foreshadowed by Mapleson had already occurred, and I should find, upon overtaking the *Olga*, that my poor

Eva was no longer in existence? It was a ghastly, blood-curdling suggestion, and it haunted me like a nightmare, despite every reassuring argument that I could find to combat it with. I found my greatest hope and encouragement in my knowledge of the Comtesse de Ste. Servine's never-failing prudence. True, in abducting Eva—if, indeed, she *had* done so—somehow I could never get wholly rid of that qualifying "if"—one would say that she had suffered herself to be tempted into an act of imprudence that must compromise her irretrievably, yet I felt absolutely certain that before committing herself at all, she had been careful to invent or provide some excuse or explanation sufficiently plausible — however false—to protect her from any very serious consequences in what would doubtless seem to her the exceedingly improbable event of her participation in the abduction being discovered. Yes, she had the prudence of an intensely selfish woman, who, while hesitating at absolutely no means, however base, for the satisfaction of her desires, would neglect no precautions to protect herself from the consequences of her evil deeds, and who would deem it a piece of contemptible folly to compromise herself one iota further than she conceived to be absolutely necessary for the success of her plans. Therefore, while I never for a single instant doubted that her purpose was to "remove" my sweetheart, and thus place Colonel Hepburn in possession of her fortune, for the joint delectation of himself and the comtesse, I felt morally convinced that

Marie de Ste. Servine would patiently wait for the chances of accident to completely exhaust themselves before incurring the tremendous risk of directly interposing to accomplish Eva's "removal." This reading of the comtesse's character had assumed the form of a settled conviction with me, and yet, despite the measure of comfort and encouragement that it gave me, there was always the haunting fear that accident might already have interposed to secure the fruition of the comtesse's purpose,—since the devil is ever as ready to aid his followers as he is certain to betray them in the end,—and therefore, although I have sedulously avoided expatiating upon my apprehensions, I felt that there could never be a single moment's peace of mind for me until my darling should be delivered from the power of her relentless enemy. From all of which the indulgent reader will perhaps be able to picture with some vividness the fever of emotions with which I watched the flight of the two schooners along the land-locked channel and the gradually decreasing space between them.

CHAPTER XIV

STRANDED AND BESET BY SAVAGES

IT had just gone eight bells in the second dog watch, and the dusk of a beautiful cloudless evening was casting its deep, mysterious shadows over the magnificent panorama of rock and luxuriant vegetation, of ravine and glacier, that hemmed us in on every side; the snow-clad mountain tops still glowed faintly with a delicate roseate flush against the deep and exquisitely pure and beautiful blue of the cold, clear sky, in which hung, close to the serrated outline of the hilly background, a fragment of new moon, gleaming with the frosty radiance of polished silver; while the gently ruffled surface of the water reflected the pallid light that still lingered in the sky, when we found ourselves abreast the entrance of the Gulf of Xaultegua, with the Straits widening out ahead of us, and but one remaining headland—on our starboard bow—intervening between us and our first glimpse of the Pacific. The *Olga*—her identity no longer questionable—was about four miles ahead, speeding along, like ourselves, under every inch of canvas she could show to the bitterly

keen and somewhat freshening breeze, and, to my inexpressible gratification, it had become apparent some time before that we were steadily overhauling her, at the rate of something like a knot and a half per hour.

There was a projecting point, with a small islet close to it, on our port bow, at which point the channel took a somewhat more southerly direction, and as we stood watching the chase, she—having some time before shifted her helm and brought the wind over her port quarter—disappeared behind it. The islet was a small affair, little more than a rock, indeed, standing about thirty feet above the water, and was steep-to at its outer extremity. Our half-caste pilot was still in charge of the ship, and was standing near the wheel, directing the helmsman how to steer from time to time by a flourish of his arm to port or to starboard, as the case might be, and he had brought us safely through all dangers thus far with such consummate skill that I had ceased to trouble myself about the navigation, and was giving my whole attention to the chase.

We were steering to shave this islet rather closely, intending to pass it at a distance of some forty fathoms, —which, from its configuration, seemed to be as wide a berth as the most prudent person could desire, and was certainly allowing a much wider margin than we had given to many other rocks that afternoon,—when, as we swept up abreast of it, the schooner's way suddenly deadened, and then—before there was time to call out,

or shift the helm, or start a sheet or halliard—with a sudden surge, and a rushing of our quarter wave the whole length of the ship, the craft was brought up all standing, there was a crashing of timber aloft, and there was the poor little *Evangeline* hard and fast ashore, upon a falling tide, with both topmasts gone close to the caps!

Here was a pretty pickle to find ourselves in, at the moment when we were exulting in the conviction that another three hours would see the great object of our voyage accomplished! Ashore, at nightfall, upon a desolate coast inhabited by savages of more than doubtful reputation, and with the ship a complete wreck aloft!

Well, cruelly exasperating as it might be, there was no help for it; it was useless to waste time in crying over spilt milk; the only thing that could now be done was to go to work and get ourselves out of our difficulty with as little delay as might be. The *Olga* had once more come into view as we drew up abreast of the islet, and her crew had no doubt witnessed our mishap, yet she held all on as she was going, manifesting not the slightest sympathy, or the slightest disposition to pause and render us any assistance.

As the schooner came to a standstill with a suddenness that set everybody staggering, Purkiss rushed away forward, yelling to the men to let go all sheets and halliards and to haul down everything, while I turned to expostulate with the pilot. That individual, however, had no desire to be expostulated with, or, at all events,

that was the impression he gave me, for as I approached him he turned, and, with a shriek of consternation, mounted from the wheel grating to the taffrail, diving thence, without an instant's pause, into the ice-cold water. He rose to the surface at an astonishing distance from the ship, and almost instantly vanished within the deep shadow cast upon the water by the islet, his whereabouts being indicated only by the two diverging lines of pallid light that marked his swift progress through the water. Presently these too vanished, and we saw the fellow no more.

A very lovely mess we were in, to be sure, with our jibs under the bows, and the raffle aloft thrashing about in the rising breeze. Purkiss and Rogers, however, knew so well what they were about, and went to work with such perfect system and intelligence, that I soon saw they could manage perfectly well without me, and we had already ascertained that the ship was perfectly safe, having stranded on a mud bank; I therefore went below to snatch a mouthful of dinner,—which meal had been announced some time before, — having tasted nothing since breakfast that morning. I was absent from the deck but a very few minutes, and when I returned to it I found that Rogers, with his watch, was busy clearing away the wreck and securing the sails; while Purkiss, with his watch, had got all the boats into the water—the launch with her fire lighted—and was making ready to lay out anchors astern for the purpose of heaving the

ship off again into deep water. So far, so good. There was one feature of the affair, however, that I did not at all like, which was the numerous signal fires lighted by the Fuegians all along the shore as far as we could see, both up and down the Straits, and it appeared to me that, unless we kept our weather eye lifting, the comparatively trifling accident that we had met with might easily be converted into a ghastly tragedy. I accordingly told off a few hands to get the lanterns lighted, to pass the arms and some ammunition on deck, and generally to see everything clear for the defence of the ship in case of need.

The men worked with a will, but we had scarcely been in our awkward situation half an hour when the canoes began to make their appearance, paddling out from every little creek and cove in the vicinity, and heading toward us with great demonstrations of friendliness and eager pantomime expressive of a yearning desire to barter. We hailed them to keep their distance, but they either could not or would not understand us, and it was not until we had fired several rifle-shots over their heads that they took the hint and withdrew.

By the time that Purkiss had laid the stream anchor out astern at the full length of our biggest hawser, with a kedge on each quarter to prevent the ship from slueing in the event of a shift of wind, Rogers and his gang had got the raffle from aloft cleared away, and all the lower canvas snugly furled ; the hands therefore took the hawsers

to the capstan, one after the other, and hove each as taut as it was possible to get it; but by this time the tide had ebbed so far that there was no hope of moving the schooner until the next high water, and the men were therefore knocked off until next morning, after hoisting the boats to their davits once more.

The fires on shore continued to blaze, while from time to time additional lights were kindled, until the whole country, as far as we could see, up and down the Straits, assumed the appearance of the brilliantly lighted suburb of some important town, and we were enabled to fully realise the aptness of the name "Fire Land" given to it by the settlers at Sandy Point. I must confess that I did not at all like the prospect suggested by this general illumination—there was far too much of it to please my fancy; I had been told that the natives were only too ready to take advantage of the circumstance of a ship being in distress to swarm aboard and plunder her, the crew in such cases seeking safety in their boats and making their way as best they could to Sandy Point, and instances had occurred of ships being wrecked in the Straits *whose crews had never been accounted for.* It was plain enough that we were in an exceedingly perilous situation, and I therefore arranged with Purkiss that the watches should be stood as usual, a bright lookout being maintained in every direction, and that every preparation should be made for the defence of the schooner.

It was a point in our favour that it was a gloriously

fine, clear night. There was not a cloud to be seen in the sky, the blue-black vault of which was studded and powdered with stars innumerable of every magnitude, from those of the first, with a brilliancy sufficient to cast a long tremulous wake upon the water, to the innumerable star-dust of the Milky Way. The young moon had set, but Jupiter hung high in the northern heaven, gleaming with the soft splendour of a silver lamp; and at frequent intervals a meteor would appear and shoot athwart the stars for a short distance ere it dissolved into glittering dust. The land engirdled us as a dense black shadow of clearly defined shape, with the snow-clad summits of the distant mountains and the broad glaciers gleaming wan and spectrally in the starlight which was also reflected in the water. There was a fresh and bitterly keen topgallant breeze blowing, which filled the air with a sound of soft moaning as it swept over our mastheads, while it stirred the vegetation ashore into mimicry of the thunder of surf upon a distant beach, and whipped the water into tiny wavelets that came lap-lapping to our counter with that peculiarity of hollow tinkling sound that is to be noticed when the water meets such an inert mass as a ship aground. To have accorded with the beauty of such a night the land should have been enwrapped in darkness and silence; but, as I have already mentioned, the Fuegian shore was lurid with the light of many fires, especially in our immediate vicinity, while there were times when the forest fairly

rang with the hooting cries of the natives. By ten o'clock the tide had fallen sufficiently to have given the ship a sharp list had she been aground on a hard bottom ; but, it being a mud bank that had brought us up, she sat perfectly upright and showed a fine bold side out of the water, which, while it would undoubtedly help us somewhat in the event of the natives becoming troublesome, made me somewhat fearful of the suction that we should have to contend with when the time arrived to begin heaving again upon our hawser.

At about midnight the noise of the natives ashore ceased, and their signal fires died out one by one, until by two bells in the middle watch the land was wrapped in darkness, and not a sound broke in upon the silence of the night save the sough of the wind among the trees, the lap of the water under the schooner's counter and along her bends, and the rippling swirl and gurgle of the tide past the islet on our larboard beam and along the rocky shore.

Another hour elapsed in unbroken tranquillity, and I was beginning to indulge the hope that we were to be allowed to pass the night without annoyance from the natives, and that I might venture to go below for an hour or two of sleep, when someone called out that he thought he could make out something moving in the deep shadow close inshore. This put everybody upon the alert, and we all strained our eyes in a determined effort to pierce the darkness that lay upon the water that way, with the

result that some agreed with the man who had given the warning, while others asserted that there was nothing there or they were positive that they would be able to see it. While the matter was still under discussion, a faint phosphoric sparkling suddenly shone out from the water in the shadow of the islet, as though the surface had been stirred by a paddle, and while we looked it appeared again.

Something was undoubtedly moving there, and at a word from Purkiss one of the men lighted a portfire and sprang into the main rigging with it, where, ascending some ten or a dozen ratlines, he held it out at arm's length over the water. The effect was wonderfully weird and startling. The brilliant but ghastly glare of the bluish-white flame fell full upon the islet abreast of us, bringing it so near that it seemed as though one could leap upon it across the intervening water, turning the green of its trees and bushes to a deadly ashen grey, and filling the rocks and tree trunks with flickering ebony shadows, which seemed to start out and waver away to the more distant trees and rocks on the main island of Santa Inez, causing them to come and go in a phantasmal white fitfulness, while the black water throbbed and palpitated under it with a glancing of the light from its ripples that looked like the spattering of molten lead. The grotesque shapes of the rocks—which the wavering shadows seemed to endow with life and convert into writhing monsters—and the baleful hue of the foliage gave a truly demoniacal

character to that part of the landscape that was thrown up out of the surrounding darkness by the light of the portfire, and it received its finishing touch from the presence of a fleet of fully fifty canoes, each manned by from four to six perfectly naked savages armed with sheaves of formidable broad-bladed spears. They were creeping stealthily out from behind the islet, and seemed to be manœuvring to come down, in the form of a crescent, upon the schooner's quarters. As the light of the portfire blazed forth, casting its ghastly illumination upon them, they raised a loud, confused yell, which seemed to equally express terror and defiance, and their formation fell into confusion—a few of the canoes manifesting a decided disposition to retreat, while the main body paused in their advance, as if irresolute.

"By Jove, Purkiss," I exclaimed, "those niggers mean mischief, and we shall have to be careful what we are about! Just fire a rifle-shot or two over their heads, lads, as a hint to them that we will stand no nonsense."

Half a dozen men seized their rifles and levelled them so as to throw the bullets well clear of the heads of those in the canoes, and an irregular volley rang out upon the night air, the report finding a thousand echoes among the rocks and trees on shore.

There was an instant's pause among the savages, as though to ascertain what damage had been done by the rifles, and then, as it became apparent that none of them were injured, a loud, exultant shout was raised, and they

dashed their paddles furiously into the water as they swept the bows of their canoes round and urged the frail craft at their utmost speed straight toward the schooner. At this moment the portfire burnt itself out, and we found ourselves suddenly plunged into a darkness that, by comparison with the recent bright glare, was impenetrable.

"Light another portfire at once!" shouted Purkiss. "Be smart, now; we must see what these niggers mean to be after!"

"I have very little doubt about their intentions," I exclaimed. "They mean to get aboard and overpower us by sheer force of numbers, if they can. Therefore let every man take a rifle and fire into them. You must shoot to *hit*, this time, lads; their rush must be stopped, and they must be prevented from gaining the deck, or it will soon be all up with us! Now, then, who is attending to that portfire?"

While the words were still upon my lips the ghastly glare again broke forth, revealing the canoes at a distance of barely fifty yards, with their occupants working furiously at their paddles.

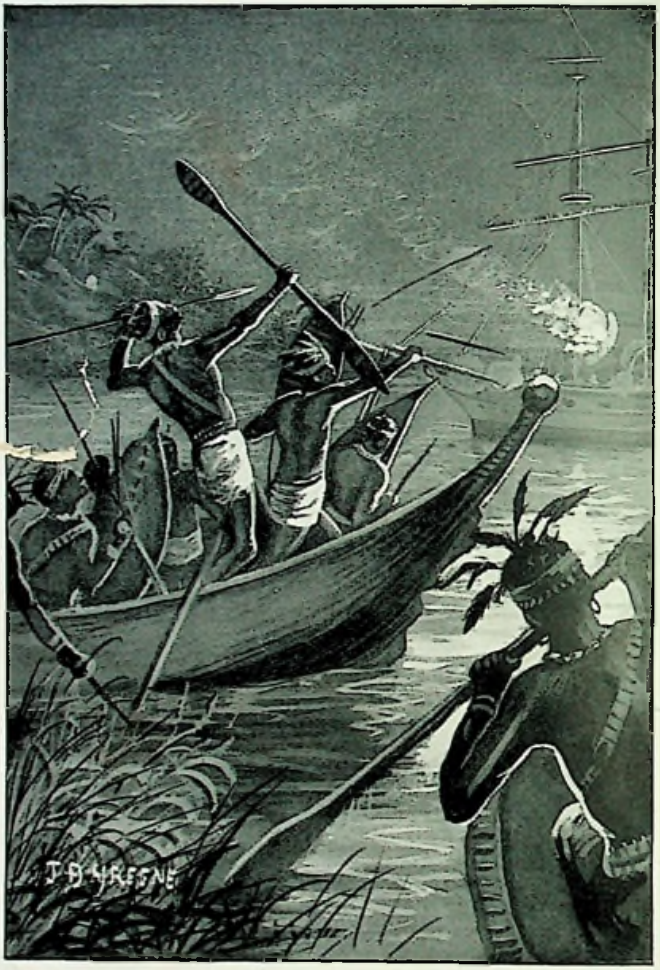
"Steady now, men!" I cried; "take careful aim, and do not throw a single shot away. Give it them while the light lasts! And have another portfire ready to light when this is expended."

My concluding words were lost in a crash of rifle-fire that broke out all round me, in a breath, as it were; and ere the smoke-wreaths had time to spread in the air and

momentarily obscure the view, I saw several of the natives fling up their arms and drop their paddles, or start convulsively to their feet, only to reel and stagger and collapse inertly as they swayed over the gunwale into the water, or sank into the bottom of a canoe. The yells which they continued to give utterance to were now mingled with sharp screams from the wounded; but they nevertheless came on with scarcely diminished ardour, and several of the unwounded started to their feet and hurled their spears at us, though without effect.

"Keep up your fire, men!" I shouted, seizing a rifle and levelling it. "They *must* be stopped, at all costs! Humanity is all very well in its proper place, but under present circumstances it would be only another name for suicide. Give it them again!"

And as I spoke I pulled trigger upon a fellow who was rendering himself conspicuous by the bold, defiant manner in which, standing upright in his canoe, he flourished his paddle, urging the others meanwhile to greater exertions by the encouragement of his voice and demeanour. He fell forward and disappeared over the bows of the canoe, and again a rattling volley rang out from the schooner's decks, the men this time keeping up their fire until the magazines of their rifles were empty. This proved to be too much for the savages, brave as they had shown themselves to be, and when the firing ceased, the hitherto compact body of canoes had broken up and resolved itself into a confused jumble of flying



BESET BY SAVAGES.

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craft, each struggling desperately to be the first to reach the shelter of the interposing islet, while fully a dozen went drifting aimlessly up the Straits upon the flowing tide, either empty, or with their crews stretched prostrate and helpless in the bottom of them. The survivors of the battle sought the shelter of the deep shadows close to the land as speedily as might be, and quickly disappeared into the numerous tiny creeks and bays that lined the shores of the Straits both above and below the point at which the schooner lay stranded; and in a quarter of an hour from the firing of the last shot there was nothing but the empty cartridge-cases lying about the decks, and a few spears, to indicate the serious character of the struggle upon which we had been engaged.

The wind died away shortly before the dawn; and when day broke, the weather was stark calm, with a beautifully blue cloudless sky, that promised a perfect day for our operations. We had noted as carefully as possible the time of low water during the night, and had calculated that it would be high water at about twenty minutes to eight that morning; the cook was therefore ordered to serve breakfast, fore and aft, at seven o'clock, so that the men might be refreshed after their night's watching and exertions by a good meal, and put in trim for further exertions when the critical moment should arrive. The boats were lowered into the water and secured to the swinging boom at daylight, and at the same time the fire was lighted in the launch's boiler, so that she should

have steam in good time to render such assistance as might be required. It occurred to me that it would be a prudent thing to lighten the schooner somewhat, so as to ensure her floating at high water; but upon my mentioning it to Purkiss, he rather opposed the idea, reminding me that we had grounded upon a falling tide, that consequently there would certainly be a much greater depth over the bank at high water than there had been when we ran upon it, and that the schooner would therefore be certain to float without any further lightening than that of her boats. He also urged the delay that would arise from the necessity to get everything back on board again after the floating of the schooner, and generally threw so many difficulties in the way that I did not press the matter.

The hawser was taken to the capstan immediately that the men turned-to after their breakfast, but only some half a dozen pawls were gained, due to the stretching of the rope, although the time was close upon high water. To my horror, however, the tide did not rise to within a good six inches of the schooner's line of flotation, and high water came and went without moving her an inch, although all hands went to the capstan except the crew of the launch, which powerful craft was sent astern with a tow-line to assist in the effort to drag the yacht afloat. We persevered, however, until the tide had fallen two or three inches, when it became apparent that we were booked for another twelve hours upon the mud; upon

which we desisted, and turned our attention to the work of lightening the schooner.

Our first task consisted in the hoisting out of the guns, which we landed upon the small islet so frequently referred to; then, a stream of beautifully clear, pure water having been found flowing from a glacier at no great distance, from which our supply could be replenished without difficulty, the tanks were emptied, only a sufficient quantity of water being retained on board to meet the necessities of the next twenty-four hours; after which we proceeded to land our shot and shell. This done, the crew were divided into three gangs, one of which, under my own supervision, went to work to construct a rough kind of battery or defence round our belongings on the islet, so as to ensure their safety during the coming night,—for even if we succeeded in getting the yacht afloat on the next flood-tide, as we hoped, it would be dark, and we should perhaps be exposed to further attacks by the savages,—while a second gang, under Rogers, collected the materials for a huge bonfire on the islet, designed to furnish us with an ample supply of light all through the night; the remaining party, under Purkiss, hoisting out and landing as much of the yacht's ballast as could be transferred to the shore in the time at their disposal. The men worked with a will, for they had no fancy for a repetition of the previous night's experiences; and by the time that it fell dark we were sanguine enough to believe that we had lightened the

schooner sufficiently to permit of her floating at high water, which was then close at hand. We were doomed to another and a very bitter disappointment, however; for when the time of high water arrived, it was discovered that the tides were taking off in the most extraordinary manner, so that, with all our lightening of the schooner, there was not sufficient water to float her.

To make short of this part of my story, the schooner was neaped; and there she lay, firmly embedded in that wretched mud bank for a solid week, the tides seeming as though they never intended to make again, until on Sunday, the 21st of October, they rose again with a rush, and, to my intense delight, the yacht floated on the top of the tide at one o'clock p.m., and we towed her to the westward of the islet, where we securely anchored her in a snug little cove until everything could be got on board her again.

But oh, what a time we had of it during that endless week! The savages—who seemed to have made up their minds that the yacht was a genuine wreck, and certainly ought to be abandoned to them — collected in ever-increasing numbers, and harassed us, night after night, keeping us upon the alert from dusk to dawn, so that we were unable to get a wink of sleep during the night, and pressing us so hard at last that, when we had emptied the schooner of everything, and could do no more to get her afloat, we were obliged to set to and build a regular fort on the islet for the defence of our property, and to

protect the schooner by tricing up boarding nettings all round her. Nor was this all. On the second day after the stranding the weather changed; the wind shifted and came out from the southward, intensely cold, and in a few hours the air was thick with snow, and the whole scene became as winterly and dismal as it is possible to imagine. Then the breeze freshened into a gale, and the temperature sank to 26° Fahrenheit—ugh! it was as uncomfortable a situation as I had ever been in, and it lasted up to the morning of the very day when we floated the schooner, the weather changing just before sunrise, with a shift of wind out from the north-east, which brought us not only a clear sky once more, with brilliant sunshine, but also a pleasant, genial warmth to thaw the frost out of our benumbed and stiffened bodies.

CHAPTER XV

WE FALL IN WITH A DERELICT BARQUE

WELL, as I have said, we got the schooner afloat again at one o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, and with such goodwill did the men labour, in the exuberance of their gratification at the prospect of escape from their unpleasant surroundings, that they actually got the whole of the stores and very nearly half the ballast back into the ship and stowed that night, before they would consent to knock off work. The greater part of the next day was consumed in getting the remainder of our belongings on board and in filling up our water tanks, so that it was four o'clock in the afternoon before the boats were finally hoisted in and we were ready to man the windlass. But although the men were almost worn out with their ceaseless toil, sleepless nights, and exposure to the bitter weather during the previous week, it was infinitely better and safer to be under way than to lie there at anchor for another night, with the possible prospect of a final attack from the natives; we therefore weighed, and bade a joyous adieu to the scene of our

hardships forthwith, and by eight o'clock that evening found ourselves clear of the last danger between us and the open waters of the Pacific, which, there being now a nearly full moon, giving us plenty of light, we reached at midnight, Cape Pillar being at that hour on our larboard beam.

But where, meanwhile, was the *Olga*? In which direction had she steered after clearing the Straits? There were three courses open to her—namely, up the western coast to South America, to Valparaiso, Callao, and, possibly, on to San Francisco; thence across the Pacific to Japan, China, and the Malay Archipelago, and home by way of India and the Red Sea, or round the Cape. Or she might stretch straight across toward the China Sea, through the multitudinous archipelago called Polynesia. Or she might head west for New Zealand and Australia. I had given this question my most anxious consideration during the time that we had been imprisoned upon the mud bank, and, taking into consideration the primary object of the comtesse in undertaking her voyage, I had at length arrived at the conclusion that she would deem her prospects of success most promising by shaping a course for the Paumotu or Low Archipelago; thence, by way of the Phœnix, Gilbert, Marshall, Caroline, and Philippine Islands, to Japan. That course, I thought, would suggest to madame an almost infinite number of opportunities for getting rid of a superfluous guest without the disagreeable necessity of resorting to the crime of

murder, and I therefore ultimately determined to adopt that route in the *Evangeline*, making such inquiry of the natives as might be possible relative to the appearance among the islands of a schooner answering to the description of the *Olga*. On clearing the Straits, therefore, I set the course at west-by-north, by compass, which would enable us to begin our inquiries at Pitcairn Island.

The wind, as I have mentioned, came out from the north-east on the morning of the Sunday that saw us once more afloat; but as the day progressed it backed more and more, until by the time that we were ready to start, it was blowing a moderate breeze from the south-east, with a tendency to freshen, and when, at midnight, we "took our departure" from Cape Pillar, the schooner was going nine and a half under her lower canvas only, we having had no time to get new topmasts on end and the ship ataunto during that miserable time upon the mud bank. We were all utterly worn out by our week's exposure and want of sleep, and I think it would have been a difficult matter to say who of us all was most unfeignedly thankful to find the broad Pacific under the yacht's forefoot. Even the vessel herself seemed, by her long, buoyant, gliding rushes over the backs of the swell, to exhibit a sentient delight at finding herself no longer cramped in her movements by narrow channels and rocks and shoals. I went below at midnight, after noting the bearings and distance of Cape Pillar, and had no sooner placed my head upon my pillow than I sank into

such a deep, dreamless slumber that Mitchell had considerable difficulty in arousing me in the morning when he came to the cabin to tell me that my bath was ready.

Having taken my dip and dressed, I went on deck to have a look round at the weather, and found the schooner bowling along at a tremendous pace, with the wind dead aft, and the mainboom guyed out over the port rail. The sky was an unbroken expanse of shapeless, windy white and grey cloud, without a break of blue to be seen anywhere, and the sea was a windy expanse of monotonous grey, chasing the schooner in long ridges of low swell, overrun by a moderate sea that frothed white in our wake. It was a dreary and depressing morning, cold and damp, with an occasional rain squall, that sometimes brought a dash of hail along with it; but it was a noble breeze that came piping after us, and it was blowing us along toward the region of perpetual summer; so, bleak and cheerless as the morning was, nobody seemed disposed to find fault with it, and my only regret was that all our spars were not aloft, that we might make the most of it. That drawback, however, was in process of being remedied, for the carpenter had already got out a couple of spare topmasts and was busily engaged upon the few trifling touches that they needed to prepare them for sending aloft, while a gang of men were at work overhauling the rigging and running gear preparatory to putting it over the mastheads and reeving it. Purkiss, like everybody else, was in high spirits; he had contrived to extract a whole night's rest

out of his undisturbed four hours below, and was full of ingenious arguments to prove that although the *Olga* had now again a full week's start of us, we were bound to overtake her somewhere among the Paumotus. His demonstration of this was in full swing when Mitchell appeared on deck to announce that my breakfast was ready.

I was still engaged upon this meal when the trampling of men aft and their cries told me that they were swaying up the main-topmast; and when, about half an hour afterwards, I went on deck again, with my pipe in my mouth, the schooner was booming along at a grand pace, with her big gaff-topsail set, and the preventer, led aft to the weather taffrail, strained to the tightness of a piano wire by the freshening breeze. The weather seemed inclined to brighten and clear, but the sky astern had a more windy look about it, which only tended to raise our spirits the higher, since the wind was fair for us, and half a gale would be none too much for us in our humour of impatience to make up for lost time.

Upon reaching the deck, I noticed that the men were making ready to send the fore-topmast aloft, and presently a man went up the fore rigging to reeve the mast-rope. Having nothing better to do, I stood idly watching the movements of this man, and presently I saw him reach the crosstrees and prepare to reach the lower-masthead by way of the peak halliard blocks of the gaff-foresail. As he laid hold of the lower block, I observed him pause

and look intently at something that appeared to have attracted his attention about the head of the mast, and presently, glancing down on deck, he shouted—

"I say, Chips, just come up here a minute, will ye, mate?"

The carpenter looked up, dropped his tools, and clambered into the rigging, and presently there the two of them were, poking and prying about the masthead. There were two or three minutes of this sort of work, and then the carpenter descended the rigging, swung himself in on deck, and came aft to me.

"Beg pardon, sir," said he, knuckling his forehead, "but I'm sorry to say as the foremast-head is sprung, sir! I expect 'twas done when we brought up on that mud bank."

"The devil!" I exclaimed, in some consternation at such serious news; for if a new mast were required, it would mean a return to the coast, and probably a détour to as far north as Valparaiso, before we should meet with a stick to suit us, and in that case there would remain scarcely a hope of our being able to overtake the *Olga* in time to save Eva from the machinations of the comtesse, if indeed we ever saw the craft again this side of home! "Is it badly sprung?"

"Well—no, sir; not to say *badly*, it ain't," was the reply; "but it'll have to be fished afore we dare send the topmast up, and I'm afear'd we can't make, not to say a downright *good* job of it, without givin' the head a clumsy look."

"Oh, never mind about the *look* of it, if you can only make a strong, trustworthy job of it," I exclaimed. "Do you think you can do that?"

"Yes, sir, I think we can," was the encouraging reply. "There's a spare pair of topsail-sheets, the bo'sun tells me, and I was thinkin' of takin' them,—chain 'll make a neater and stronger job than rope, and it won't stretch, either,—and usin' of 'em along with a lot of long, narrer, hardwood wedges, enough to go right round the head, which we can tauten up by drivin' after the chain's passed round 'em."

"Very well," said I. "That seems a fairly promising plan. Get about it at once, and let us see what sort of a job you can make of it."

The man again knuckled his forehead, and withdrew; and presently I had the satisfaction of seeing him busily at work on the fore-deck, sawing his wedges out of an oak plank.

The job of fishing the foremast-head occupied the carpenter and two hands during the whole of the forenoon watch; and when it was finished, it presented, as Chips had foreboded, a somewhat clumsy appearance. That, however, I could afford to ignore, under the circumstances; for, if clumsy-looking, the job was certainly strong, and might, with care, serve us until we could procure another spar. As soon as the men had finished their dinner, they went to work to get the fore-topmast fidded and the yards across, and by eight bells in the afternoon watch the schooner was once more under square canvas and reeling

off her twelve knots per hour, although Purkiss—who had been aloft to take a look at the masthead—was not disposed to subject the wounded spar to the strain of the studding-sails.

This fine breeze followed us until the end of the afternoon watch on the third day out from the Straits—by which time the schooner had pushed her way no less a distance than eight hundred miles into the Pacific solitudes—when the wind fell light, and, after dwindling to a light and baffling air, came out a small breeze from the westward, breaking us off our course a couple of points, and reducing our speed to a bare five and a half knots. With the setting of the sun a trifle more weight came into the breathing, and we managed to average seven knots through the night; but when I went on deck next morning, it was to find a clear, brilliantly blue sky overhead, without a trace of cloud in it, and the sea a glassy plain of long, low, sluggish undulations, barely flecked here and there by the faint stirring of the almost motionless air. Yet the yacht had steerage-way, and Purkiss informed me that the log—which had been hove at eight bells—gave her a speed of very nearly four knots.

"There's a wreck away down there on the lee bow, sir," he added. "A biggish craft she looks from aloft; but she's apparently water-logged, and I expect she'll turn out to be one of these here derelicks that's to be found knockin' about the hocean now and again for ships to run foul of and wreck theirselves upon in the darkness

and the stormin' of a dirty night. They're a precious sight worse than a sunken rock are them derelicks, for I reckon that there's a precious few rocks but what you'll find laid down upon the chart, and you can steer clear of 'em; but you never knows when you're goin' to blunder up again' a derelick."

While Purkiss had been speaking I had stepped over to the lee side of the deck—whither he had followed me—and, looking ahead, had descried three upright objects close together, which the marvellous clearness and transparency of the atmosphere enabled me to at once identify as the three masts of a barque; for the fore and main masts still had the lower yards attached, while the character of the mizzenmast was discernible even at the distance of some seven or eight miles which still separated us. I took the telescope out of its brackets, and brought it to bear upon her; but, although her gaff was still in its place and her mizzen-topmast on end, there was no sign of a distress signal to be seen flying, nor any other indication that living beings were on board her, although our canvas would be in plain view from her deck. That question, however, would be definitely settled in due course, as immediately upon seeing her I had determined to board and set fire to her; for, as Purkiss had remarked, a drifting derelict constitutes one of the most deadly perils that menace the seaman in the pursuit of his calling.

It was about six bells in the forenoon watch when we rounded-to and backed our topsail under the lee and

within biscuit-toss of the barque; for the paltry air that was stirring had been growing more and more stagnant with the advance of the morning, until it had become a wonder to me where the schooner acquired her continued power of motion from; but that motion had at length become so sluggish that it was perfectly evident that, even had we not hove-to, our further progress—under sail at least—would soon be stayed.

We were now close enough to the wreck to be able not only to distinguish every detail with the utmost clearness, but also to hear the creaking and groaning of her hull, and the wash and gurgle of the water along her sides as she wallowed over the low undulations of the expiring swell, with the jerking of the spanker gaff and boom to her roll; and her general aspect was such as to assure the most casual spectator that it was utterly out of the question that any living being could be on board her.

She was a flush-decked barque of about four hundred and fifty tons, built of wood, and was sunk to her channels; while the astonishingly luxuriant growth of barnacles upon her sides which was revealed every time that she rolled away from us was conclusive evidence that she must have been floating about in that condition for several weeks, if indeed the period might not be extended to months. Her fore and main topmasts were gone just above the caps, but the rigging still hung, grey and weather-perished, from her tops, and the unequal lengths in which it drooped clearly demonstrated that the raffle

had never been cut away, but had broken adrift after washing about alongside for who shall say how long a time. The two lower-yards were braced sharp up on the starboard tack, and while the mainsail, grey and rotted-looking, was stowed, the bolt-ropes of the fore course still hung from its yard, with a few rags of rotten canvas clinging to it, and the chain tack bowsed down to the starboard cathead. The fore-sheet had disappeared, but the clew garnet blocks were still attached to the cringles, with the clew garnets rove; and the buntlines, leechlines, bowline bridles, and bowlines were still in their places. The bowsprit still stood, with the heel of the jib-boom in the caps; but the dolphin-striker was gone. The bulwarks also had vanished, from just abaft the catheads clear aft to the taffrail, and boats, booms, and everything movable had disappeared from her decks. She carried a pair of davits on each quarter, the tackles of which were overhauled, with the blocks sunk deep beneath the surface of the water, indicating that her crew had abandoned her in the quarter-boats; but even the tackles bore mute evidence of the time that must have elapsed since this took place in the long growth of sea-grass that trailed from the submerged part of the falls. And if any further testimony were required of the lengthy period during which this waif had been drifting about the ocean, it might have been found in the paint upon her sides, which was so faded and sea-washed that it was impossible to tell what its original colour had been. Altogether, she looked a

most melancholy spectacle as she lay there, rising and falling in a languid, feeble, lifeless manner upon the swell—a spectacle that, on all accounts, could not be obliterated too soon.

With this object in view, the gig was lowered, and Rogers, with six hands, was sent away to give the craft a thorough overhaul, so far as her condition permitted, and afterwards to set fire to her. And, meanwhile, the launch was lowered and her fire lighted, so that she might be in readiness to take us in tow as soon as the destruction of the barque should be assured.

All hands were, naturally, on deck to view this mournful relic of an ocean tragedy, and just as the gig shot up alongside her, the boatswain came shambling aft, and remarked—

"Beg pardon, sir, but would you be so good as to ask Mr. Rogers to take a squint at that there barque's mizzen-mast? I've been lookin' at it, and from here it has all the 'pearance of a first-rate stick, and if so be it should turn out to be as good as it looks, p'rhaps you might think it worth while to spend the time to whip it out of her. That there foremast-head of ours is all right, I 'low, sir, so long as the weather holds fine; but, come to fall in with a gale o' wind, I'm afraid it'd be a bad lookout with it."

"Um!" said I. "That is by no means a bad idea of yours, Sennitt. But supposing the spar to be worth having, how long do you think it would take you to lift it?"

"Why, sir," said the man, "with such a working gang as we can muster, I'd undertake to have it aboard here, ready for Chips to go to work upon, in a couple of hours, or less."

"It's worth the time, Mr. Berrington, and more than worth it," here struck in Purkiss. "As the bo'sun here says, that foremast-head of ours—though I don't want to say a word again' the job he and Chips have made of it—ain't to be trusted, except in fine weather; and if it was to go, where should we be, with p'rhaps no more head-sail than the stay-foresail—if so much—that we could show? Why, we should lose time to that extent that there 'd be no estimatin' of it; to say nothin' of the chance of bein' caught, crippled, upon a lee shore down among them islands that we're makin' for."

I walked to the skylight and looked long at the aneroid and mercurial barometers, both of which had been set at ten o'clock that morning. They stood high, with the barest perceptible indication of a rise in them both since their setting, while the head of the column of mercury showed slightly convex in the tube.

"The barometers seem to say that this weather is to continue," I remarked, glancing all round the sky, "and I see no prospect *there*"—with a flourish of my hand all round the horizon—"of any immediate change. So far, therefore, as the weather is concerned, there is nothing to be urged against Sennitt's proposal. I will tell you what we will do," I continued, turning to Purkiss. "Hail

Rogers to send the gig back, and Sennitt and the carpenter can then go aboard the wreck and have a look at the spar, after which, if it proves to be really worth the trouble, we can go to work and unstep it."

The boatswain, construing my words into an order, walked away forward, when, after he and the carpenter had exchanged a few words together, the pair of them dived into the forecastle, from whence they emerged, a few minutes later, with some tools in their hands. Purkiss, meanwhile, hailed the gig to come alongside for the two men, and shouted to Rogers not to set fire to the ship until further orders; and in a few minutes the transfer was effected, and presently the carpenter appeared clawing his way slowly up the mizzenmast by way of the hoops of the furled spanker, carefully examining the spar as he went, while the boatswain shinned up the rigging—at the risk of frequent falls through the bursting of the rotten ratlines under his weight—to the crosstrees, where he subjected the head of the mast to an equally stringent inspection.

At length the two men descended to the deck, and, entering the gig, returned to the schooner, coming straight aft to me with their report at once.

"The spar is a most beautiful stick, sir," remarked the carpenter; "not a crack nor a flaw in him anywhere, so far as I can make out, havin' been purtected by the paint that it's coated with. It's as good as our own foremast, sir, and 'll want very little redoocin' to bring it down to

the size we wants it. We can't do better than take it, sir."

"Very well," said I, turning to Purkiss. "Our best plan, then, will be to let all hands go to dinner, which I suppose is ready for them by this time; and after dinner we will send a good strong gang on board in the launch, with all the tackle necessary for rigging a pair of sheers and lifting the mast. What have we that will serve for a pair of sheers?"

"I proposes that we send down them two lower-yards aboard the wreck, sir," cut in the boatswain. "They're just the sticks for the job, and 'll save us all the trouble of takin' anything of our own. Moreover, they're stronger than anything that we've got for the purpose."

"So be it," said I, in settlement of the matter; and with that the gig went back to fetch off Rogers and those who still remained on board the wreck with him.

I must confess that when the boatswain undertook to whip the mizzenmast out of the barque, and place it upon the deck of the yacht, ready for the carpenter to begin work upon it, within a couple of hours, I thought he overrated his own powers and those of the yacht's crew; for there were the topmast and the fore and main yards to be sent down, and the sheers to be rigged and raised—a heavy job of itself—before the mast could be lifted, and I should have deemed the whole job a tolerably smart one if performed by a man-o'-war's crew in the time specified; but Sennitt proved to be a better man than I

had thought him,—indeed, I afterwards learned that he had served in the navy,—and he actually succeeded in accomplishing his self-imposed task within the time he had allowed himself. Indeed, he did more; for he not only brought away the lowermast, but also the topmast and the two lower-yards; for the reason, as he explained, that the latter would make a better pair of sheers, for stepping the mast again, than anything that we had on board the yacht.

The lowermast was no sooner parbuckled up over the side and laid along inboard than the carpenter got a gang of men to work upon it to remove the paint, with the aid of a detergent, with the resulting discovery that we had secured a magnificent spar, quite equal in every respect to our own foremast. This done, the task of reduction was at once commenced, and as it happened that very little of this was needed to bring it down to the required dimensions, considerable progress was made in the preparation of the mast before the carpenter knocked off work that night.

Meanwhile, Rogers, with a working party, remained on board the barque after the mizzenmast was taken out of her, to adopt measures for her destruction. She was, as has been said, a flush-decked vessel, and the first discovery made by the mate on boarding her was that her cabin and forecastle were more than half full of water; it had therefore been found impossible to penetrate to the interior of either, as a result of which no papers or docu-

ments of any kind had been found to give a clue to the ship's identity, the only information in that direction being the words "*Diane—Bordeaux*," painted in white letters across her stern. She was timber-laden, her cargo consisting of deals, and it was therefore no wonder that she had been drifting about for so long a time. The deals came right up flush with the under edge of her deck-beams, and the top tiers, to the depth of seven or eight, were quite dry, showing that she had not been exposed to very heavy weather for some time; Rogers therefore broke out about a dozen planks, which he sawed and split into convenient sizes for kindling a good fire in the main hatchway, and then, having arranged others below in such a way as to create a free draught between them, he built his fire, started a cask of coal tar over the whole, and set a light to it, his intention being to destroy the deck and upper works of the wreck, and thus give the remainder of the hull a chance to sink from underneath the cargo that had for so long a time sustained it. It was nearly two bells in the first dog watch ere his preparations were completed to his satisfaction, by which time it had fallen so flat a calm that I gave orders for the steam launch to go ahead of the schooner with a tow line; but as we drew away it was satisfactory to see that a dense smoke, mingled with fierce tongues of flame, was already pouring out of the wreck's main hatchway, giving promise of her speedy destruction.



THE LAST OF THE BARQUE.

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CHAPTER XVI

WE SEE A VISION OF THE *OLGA*

ON leaving the barque a course was shaped W.S.W., by compass, to put us again into the supposed track of the *Olga*, which we had every reason to believe had carried a fair wind with her to a much greater distance from the western extremity of the Straits than we had yet reached, and by sunset we had placed the horizon between ourselves and the semi-sunken fabric to which we had set fire. But long before that, a great black cloud of smoke, shaped like a flattened balloon, had gathered in the motionless air over the dangerous derelict, and as the night fell the under surface of this cloud was illuminated by a strong ruddy glare, while a brilliant ball of flame, that seemed to hang upon the horizon and cast its lurid radiance far over the surface of the water, proved that the craft was blazing briskly, and would soon cease to be a menace to unsuspecting sailors. The light shone in the sky until nearly four bells in the first watch, when it suddenly vanished, leading us to hope that the charred remains of the *Diane* of Bordeaux had gone to the bottom.

Shortly after midnight a small air of wind came out from the north-west, and soon freshened sufficiently to permit of the steam launch being hoisted to her davits once more; and when I went on deck at eight o'clock, I found a fine fresh breeze blowing over the starboard quarter, and the schooner going along over the flashing sapphire of the long Pacific surges at a clean eleven-knot pace, although she showed nothing above her topsail to the brilliant gushing of the sweet salt air. The sky was cloudless, and the whole atmosphere seemed full of exhilarating sunshine, but I immediately noticed that not only was Purkiss sparing the foremast as far as it was possible for human nature to do so in the face of that glorious fair wind, but there were quite a number of gilguys and preventer backstays supporting the spar that had not been there when I turned in at midnight on the previous night.

"Yes, sir," said the old fellow, with a melancholy shake of the head, in answer to the glance I sent aloft at his seamanlike arrangements, "its hours is numbered. We had a freshish breeze in the early hours of the morning, and p'rhaps owin' to our havin' secured another spar to take its place, we wasn't quite so careful as we ought to have been in the matter of shortenin' sail. Consequence was that when it come daylight we sees as the wedges had worked loose, and the topmast was lookin' over the bows as though it meditated taking a dive into the smother under the forefoot, and we had to clew up and furl everything in

a hurry. Chips have been up there and have drove in some new wedges, by which means we've been able to give her the taups'l again; but the sooner we gets a chance to step the new spar, the better I shall be pleased. And p'rhaps, now that we've got another spar to fall back upon, it's just as well that we should know the worst in time; for it's easy to see that with that there foremast-head sprung to the extent that it is, it would be a bad lookout if we was to happen to fall in with heavy weather."

This was so self-evident that I could not help joining the old fellow in his self-gratulation at our good luck in having fallen in with the derelict on the previous day under circumstances that permitted of our helping ourselves to a good stick; but it struck me that it was decidedly foolhardy to carry even as much sail as we were then showing upon a mast now known to be badly sprung; I therefore directed Purkiss not only to take in the topsail, but to send all the yards down on deck while the operation might still be performed without undue risk to the men. Meanwhile, the carpenter had again started work upon the new spar, and, in answer to my inquiries, expressed himself as sanguine of having the mast ready for stepping on the evening of the morrow.

It happened, however, that although Chips succeeded in keeping his word, the opportunity to step the mast was not forthcoming; for during the night the wind lulled somewhat, and then came out fresh from the northward,

with so heavy a swell that, even had I been disposed to bring the ship to a sea-anchor for the purpose of shifting the lowermast, the movement of her was altogether too lively to justify me in running the risk of raising a pair of sheers, and we therefore had to keep on as best we could under nothing but our stay-foresail and close-reefed main-sail—the state of the foremast being by this time such that it had become necessary to stow the boom-foresail and send the topmast down on deck. This condition of affairs prevailed for nearly a week, or until the following Wednesday, when the wind began to drop through the night, and finally died away just before the dawn of Thursday, the 1st of November.

When I went on deck that morning, I found a sea like glass, so smooth, indeed, that when, an hour later, Purkiss and I took the sun for the purpose of determining our longitude, we had the utmost difficulty in distinguishing the horizon from the clear, soft, delicate pearly grey of the sky that met it, while the spacious vault overhead was as clear and pure and lovely a blue as I had ever seen. The glasses, too, were standing high, so that there was every appearance of our having once more fallen upon a streak of fine quiet weather, such as was eminently suitable for the task we had to accomplish. I found that Purkiss had made every preparation in the way of rousing out the necessary tackle for the operation, and had even gone the length of getting the two lower-yards laid along and their extremities crossed ready for lashing, so that the work

might be started in earnest immediately upon my giving the word. He had also stowed all canvas, and lowered the launch, with orders that she was to get steam for taking the yacht in tow, so that there might be as little delay as possible in our progress. Of course I was only too delighted to find that so favourable an opportunity had presented itself for the performance of a job that was now become pressing and urgent, and gladly gave the word for the work to be started forthwith.

By the time that I reached the deck again, after breakfast, I found that the boatswain had got the sheers rigged, with their heads pointing forward over the bows, and their heels chocked against a spar laid athwart the deck and passed through the two gun-ports just forward of the mainmast, with the heel tackles for skidding them forward bowsed well taut, and a tackle brought down from the hounds of the foremast to the head of the sheers, for raising them. The fall of this tackle was led through a snatch-block to the capstan ; and a minute or two later, all being ready, the order was given to heave away, and the sheers were raised. Then, the after-guys being hauled taut and belayed, while the fore-guys were led inboard through a couple of blocks at the bowsprit end, and carefully tended, as well as the fall of the lifting purchase, the heel tackles were manned and the heels of the sheers skidded forward until they were in their right position, when all was ready for the heaving out of the damaged foremast. The fore runner tackles were then unhooked,

and the main runners taken forward to the fore runner eye-bolts, and set up, to support the mainmast when the triatic stay should be let up.

Nothing now remained but to cast adrift the jib, fore, and triatic stays and to unreeve the lanyards of the fore rigging, the tackles for lifting the mast having already been hooked on and set taut, when the carpenter knocked out the wedges, the main purchase fall was taken to the capstan, and, with a gang of men each to tend the small purchase and the topping-lift, the sprung mast was hove out, laid along the deck, and unrigged. This done, the rigging was slipped over the new lowermast-head, and the spar slung, pointed, and stepped in a very short time, to my inexpressible relief; and when at length the men knocked off for dinner, the lower rigging and stays were set up, the sheers lowered and cast adrift, and the topmast pointed ready for sending aloft. And when, finally, the hands knocked off at four bells in the first dog watch, the schooner was once more all ataunto, with royal-yard across and studding-sail booms aloft, in short, ready for any eventuality that might betide us.

Our observations at noon that day placed us in lat. 35° 15′ S. and long. 112° 13′ W., or rather more than half-way from the western end of Magellan Straits to Pitcairn Island.

The night that followed this day of toil and activity was one of the finest that I ever remember meeting with at sea. The sky was a clear and spacious vault of the

deepest and purest indigo, powdered and spangled with stars innumerable of every magnitude, which glowed and glittered with a mild, benignant lustre sufficiently brilliant to render the horizon distinctly visible in every direction, ay, and even to have shown us a ship at eight or nine miles' distance, had there been one to see. The water was so glassy smooth that not only was its surface tremulous with the quivering wakes of the larger and more brilliant stars,—like wavering threads of gold and silver running through a fabric of sheeny silk,—but it also reflected, in a delicate resplendency that was a wonder of itself, the streaming starlight of the entire glittering vault, so that the ship appeared to be floating suspended in the exact centre of a vast globe of deepest, diamond-studded blue.

The launch was still ahead, towing the yacht, and the faint throb of her engines, with the delicate hissing and seething of the water driven astern by her propellers, were the only sounds that broke the perfect stillness and deep silence of the breathless night; for the watch on deck, having been on duty all day, were taking advantage of the calm to get a little rest, and having "pricked for the softest plank," were now stowed away about the fore-deck, snatching a cat-nap—all, that is to say, with the exception of the lookout, the man at the wheel, and the officer of the watch. I remained on deck until midnight, enjoying the beauty and quiet and mystery of the glorious night, and then, noticing that the barometers stood high and were perfectly steady, went below and turned in.

The following day was as breathlessly calm and peaceful as the night had been; and, not to be prolix, this wonderful weather remained with us for five days, by which time we had reached a spot in the Pacific some five hundred and thirty miles to the southward and eastward of Ducie Island, the most easterly of the Paumotu Archipelago.

On the day, however, previous to this—which, by the way, I remember, was a Sunday—a phenomenon occurred that, in the light of its result, was undoubtedly the most astonishingly fortunate incident of the whole voyage. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and we were steering the same course that we had been following for several days past,—the weather being still stark calm, and the steam launch still ahead perseveringly towing us along the mirror-like surface of the slumbering deep,—I being at the time more than half asleep in a particularly comfortable deck-chair under the awning, when a little buzz of excitement seemed suddenly to spring up among the men on the forecastle, and one of them sang out—

"D'ye see that craft in the sky, away there on our starboard bow, sir?"

Rogers, who was in charge of the deck, stepped to the rail and looked forward, while I, reluctantly quitting my seat, followed his example.

"Well!" the fellow exclaimed, staring ahead so intently, and so completely lost in amazement that he was evidently quite oblivious of my close proximity to him, "dash my ugly old wig, if that ain't the queerest sight as ever *I* see'd!

I've heard of the thing before, but I never quite believed it. Why, she's clear away up in the sky, and floatin' keel up'ards!"

It was as the man said. There was a most wonderfully delicate inverted image of a vessel in the sky on our starboard bow, at an angle of fully twenty degrees above the horizon, and although I had seen the same thing more than once before, never yet had I witnessed anything so clear, distinct, and deceptive as this picture. If the original of it had been by some extraordinary means suspended, keel upward, in the sky, at a distance of twelve or fourteen miles, the illusion could not have been more perfect. So sharply defined, indeed, was the image that it showed like a solid object through the telescope that I brought to bear upon it, and, inverted though it was, it took me less than a minute to identify the marvellous reflection as that of the *Olga*.

Purkiss was below, indulging in an afternoon snooze, but that there might be no mistake whatever about the matter, I had him roused out; and when he had come on deck, and had subjected the image to a prolonged and most careful scrutiny, he emphatically confirmed my judgment that it was that of the *Olga*, and none other.

Of course we at once carefully took the bearings of the phantasm, and shifted our helm for it, knowing that the yacht herself must be somewhere away beyond the horizon, immediately beneath the mirage; but that she was still at a

considerable distance from us was clear, from the fact that no sign or trace of the craft was visible from our royal-yard.

The reflected image being upside down, of course it was a little difficult to make out details; but a patient, careful study of it showed the vessel to be lying with her port quarter toward us, with her royal and topgallant sail clewed up but not furled, the tack of the mainsail triced up, and all other plain sail set; but it was clear enough that she was, like ourselves, becalmed; for—so sharp and brilliant was the image—we could even detect the wrinkling shadows that rippled slowly across the surfaces of her sails to her languid heaving upon the invisible swell; and *above* her there floated a blur of whiteness that could be nothing else than the phantom reflection of her pearl-white canvas in the mirror-like surface upon which she rested. There was a peculiarity in the posture of the image that both Purkiss and I at once noticed; it represented the vessel as floating not horizontally, but as though upon an inclined plane, with her bows sensibly depressed below the level of her taffrail. I had witnessed such an appearance once before, on the African coast, and I now knew that it indicated that the craft was still at a very great distance from us, although the extraordinary magnifying power of the air had enlarged her image sufficiently to permit of its easy identification. As the afternoon wore on, the reflection underwent no sufficiently marked change of dimensions to indicate that we were appreciably shortening the distance between the two ships; but it gradually grew more distorted of shape,

until it became dismembered, and finally disappeared about an hour before sunset.

Just about this hour there occurred the first faint, subtle, and indefinable alteration in the character of the atmosphere that is the forerunner of a change of weather. For several days past the sky had been without a trace of cloud; but now, as the sun settled away into the west and approached the horizon, his disc became distorted and magnified in the most startling manner, until, when he hung for a few minutes close above the water's edge, he assumed the appearance of a gigantic, misshapen globe of glowing red-hot iron, of so fierce an incandescence that the sky all round about him was kindled into flame. For although there were still no clouds to be seen, the sky was imperceptibly losing that most marvellous brilliancy and purity of colour that had distinguished it for the past few days, and was acquiring instead a dim, hazy appearance that, down in the western quarter, was already sufficiently pronounced to reproduce the glowing tints of the sinking sun, and stain the horizon with the hues of smoke and fire and blood.

Within a few minutes of the sun's disappearance, the stars began to twinkle out from the eastern sky, but with a wan, misty radiance that was in marked contrast to their wonted bland and mellow effulgence, and it was not long ere almost all but those of the first or second magnitude had disappeared again, and the night become astonishingly dark, considering that the brighter constellations

were still visible. Finally, these too disappeared, and we found ourselves involved in a close and breathless darkness that seemed to close round us like the collapsing walls of a dungeon. Then, when I went below to dinner, I noticed that a slight fall had taken place in the barometers, which the concave summit of the mercury column indicated was to continue. And by and by, about four bells in the first watch, we began to feel the first faint heavings of a gathering swell that came creeping up on the schooner's starboard beam and that by midnight was causing her to roll to her channel-bolts. As the night wore on, the air grew oppressively close and sultry; so much so, indeed, that being unable to open the scuttles in my cabin, in consequence of the rolling of the ship, I was glad at last to have my mattress and pillow taken on deck and spread beneath the awning, where I at least secured the benefit of the light draught of air created by the passage of the vessel through it. The sudden and very marked increase of the temperature, with the pitchy blackness of the sky, had at first led us to suppose that there was thunder in the air; but if so, it remained pent within the bosoms of the stooping clouds, for there was not the faintest shimmer of lightning throughout the night, nor did the darkness become in the slightest degree less dense when, about midnight, the moon—just entered upon her last quarter—was due to rise. That she actually *did* rise at her appointed time we never doubted; but, so far as her illuminating powers on that particular night were concerned, she might have

ceased to exist, for all that we knew to the contrary. Yet, hour after hour, the sturdy little launch toiled on untiringly ahead of us, sometimes with a little stream of sparks pouring from her funnel when the stoker stirred his fire, but oftener with nothing to betray her presence save the small gleam from her binnacle lamp and the stream of pallid sea fire that swept aft from her propellers, and hour after hour the yacht wallowed heavily along in her wake, with the usual melancholy rhythmical accompaniment of creaking and groaning and clattering sounds that issue from the hull and spars of a rolling ship.

This dismal state of affairs continued all through the night, the swell slowly but steadily gathering weight and volume, while the mercury as steadily sank in the tube of the barometer, leaving us no excuse for doubting that we were fairly booked for a regular Pacific hurricane.

When the day at length broke, which it did tardily, it disclosed as cheerless and gloomy a prospect as perhaps the ocean could possibly offer to the eye of man. The deep, pure brilliant blue of the unclouded sky to which we had grown accustomed had given place to an unbroken expanse of dull, lowering, indigo-tinted cloud, without a shape or outline anywhere in its vast spread to break its frowning uniformity. The sea was of the exact hue of melted lead, and the long glassy undulations of the swell crept up out of the north-eastern quarter to the ship with the slow, ponderous heaving movement that you would have expected to find in an ocean of that

metal. There was not a breath of air stirring, as you might know by looking at the sulky, oil-smooth folds that came brimming to the yacht's channels, while the thin draught athwart the decks that was created by the long heavy rolls of the ship upon the ponderous undulations was hot and stifling to a degree that made one fairly gasp for breath. Still, but for the steady shrinkage of the mercury, there was just then nothing absolutely portentous in the aspect of the weather; the gathering swell was indicative of a breeze from the north-east—probably a strong breeze, or even a gale of wind; but the sky was just one of those that a man can make nothing certain of, and must wait for further indications; as it then showed it might mean anything, from a thunderstorm violent enough, one might suppose, to shake the solid foundations of the earth, to a hurricane that would tax our skill to the utmost to keep the schooner above water. This uncertainty of aspect in the weather, however, only showed that, whatever was to be the outcome of its threat, it was not imminent,—there would be time enough to make some sort of preparation for it; and now that we had daylight—or, at all events, a gloomy twilight—to let the men see what they were about, we lost no time in bringing the schooner into trim for the conflict.

We were, it will be remembered, towing under bare poles; there was consequently no canvas to stow, and all that had to be done was to send down yards and

topmasts, rig in the jib-boom, and rouse out, bend, and set a storm fore-trysail. To this task, accordingly, the men were set as soon as there was daylight enough for them to see their work, and, as the swell was steadily making, it was my intention to continue towing until eight bells, and then put all hands on to the job of hoisting the steam launch, which indeed had been allowed to remain afloat somewhat over-long already. This intention, however, was unexpectedly annulled, for the hands had no sooner gone aloft than the man who was to send down the royal-yard shouted—

"Sail ho, right ahead!"

"Ay, ay, my man, what d'ye make of her?" responded Purkiss, who, like myself, had passed the night on deck, and was now superintending matters generally.

"Can't say exactly, sir," was the reply. "She's too far off to distinguish with the naked eye down in the gloom yonder, but I fancy she's but a small hooker."

"Heavens and earth! can it be the *Olga*, Purkiss?" I ejaculated. "She is *somewhere* directly ahead of us, I will swear,—the mirage that we saw yesterday makes that a certainty,—and that same appearance ought to be a proof that she cannot be very far off."

"I'll take the glass aloft, Mr. Berrington, sir, and see what I can find out about her," answered Purkiss; and a minute or two later the old fellow was on the royal-yard, peering intently straight ahead at some object that was invisible from the deck. He remained there

a long five minutes, working away diligently with the telescope, then closed the instrument with an air of decision, slung it behind him, and made his way deliberately down on deck.

"Well, Mr. Berrington, sir," he remarked, in a tone of intense gratification, "I ain't prepared to exactly *swear* that the craft ahead is the *Holger*, because we ain't near enough to her yet for her hull to show from our royal-yard, but there's no mistake about her bein' a *schooner*. And, if looks counts for anything, I'd go so far as to wager a farden's worth of silver spoons that she's the craft whose shadder we saw in the sky yesterday a'ternoon, for this here vessel ahead is under the *h*identical same canvas that she showed, and it's set in the same way, too, exceptin' the royal and to'ga'nts'l, which are now stowed. And, if I wasn't mistaken just now, they were busy reefin' their topsail at the time when I was lookin' at 'em."

"There can scarcely be a doubt as to her being the *Olga*," said I, as I glanced anxiously all round at the aspect of the weather. "How far distant do you reckon her to be, Purkiss?"

"Why, a matter of fifteen or sixteen mile, I should say, Mr. Berrington, sir," was the reply.

"Um! that means fully four hours—perhaps five—before we can reach her, at our present rate of progress," I remarked. "And who can tell what the weather may be in five hours' time? Blowing a hurricane, in all probability, if the barometer is to be trusted."

I went to the skylight and peered down at the instrument. The mercury was already alarmingly low, and evidently still falling. Once more I glanced anxiously round at the weather. There was but little difference noticeable since daybreak, save that the sky seemed to have acquired a still deeper depth of gloom—a darker tone of indigo—away to the north-east.

"I doubt whatever's to come 'll be along here afore we're four hours older, sir," answered Purkiss, as he, too, intently scanned the sky away in the north-eastern board, from which quarter we expected the outburst.

"Yes," said I, "and in that case we shall be too late to take off Miss Hepburn before the outfly comes. The result of which may be that we shall lose the *Olga* during the gale, and not find her again, perhaps, until it is too late. I'll not risk it, Purkiss. The launch can do the run to yonder schooner and back in two and a half hours. I will take her, and risk getting back in time; she is a good boat, and even if we happen to be caught, ought to weather it out long enough to enable us to regain the *Evangeline*. Call her alongside at once, Purkiss; I will not waste another moment. I ought to take some men with me, in case of any attempt at resistance on the part of the Russians, but I will not *compel* anyone to go. If ten of the men are willing to accompany me, I will take them; if not, I will go alone; a less number would be useless, and would only take up room."

"Ay, ay, sir; I'll see about it at once," answered

Purkiss; and away he went forward with alacrity, although I could see that the old fellow regarded my resolution as little less than a sudden outburst of insanity.

And, in truth, it *was* a mad idea to propose undertaking a journey of two and a half hours' duration in so small a craft as the steam launch, in the face of such an ominous sky as that which lowered and frowned above us at that moment, and in the face, too, of such an unmistakable warning as that which the barometer was mutely uttering there in the skylight. Our only chance of success, of course, lay in the possibility of our accomplishing the trip before the outburst of the threatened hurricane, and it was just that possibility that I was reckoning on. The sky, menacing as was its appearance, was not so portentous as to lead me to the belief that the outburst was imminent, and I was guided, too, to a very great extent by the look of the swell, which I believed would have been very much heavier than it actually was, had the wind been close behind it. Still, it was a desperate step that I proposed to take, and nothing short of the dread of losing the *Olga* during the progress of the expected gale would have induced me to take it.

Purkiss walked away forward, and hailed the launch to cast off and come alongside, and then, as soon as he had received their answer, dropped through the forescuttle. He remained in the forecastle very nearly five minutes, and then, reappearing, walked aft and rejoined me near the companion.

"Well, Mr. Berrington, sir," said he, "I've found ten men as are willin' to go away in the launch, and they'll be on deck, ready to start, in a brace of shakes. You'll take along a little bread and some water, and perhaps a nip of grog, by way of breakfast for 'em and yourself, I s'pose, won't ye, sir? And I s'pose you'd like 'em to be armed, too, wouldn't ye, sir? They won't be of much use in case of resistance unless they has something in the way of arms with 'em." And the old fellow looked at me dubiously, as though, for his part, he had not the remotest notion how I proposed to conduct so mad an expedition.

"Yes," answered I. "Tell the steward to pass the best makeshift breakfast he can into the launch at once, with a full keg of water and some bread; and while I am making my own preparations for the trip, I will get you, Purkiss, to serve out to the men a cutlass and a brace of revolvers with a dozen rounds of ammunition each. By the way, do you think the fellows will fight, if necessary?"

"Yes, sir; I don't doubt but what they will, if you asks 'em to," replied the old fellow uneasily. "But it's a risky thing as you're thinkin' of, Mr. Berrington, sir; something very like piracy, ain't it, sir?"

"Scarcely," said I. "However, I will take all the risk of that; and, to tell you the truth, Purkiss, I am only taking the men with me at all in order to make such a show of force as will discourage all idea of resistance on the part of the Russians. And now I must leave you to act to

the best of your judgment during my absence. You know the direction in which we are going, and should any wind come, you must do all you can to close us. Keep a bright lookout for the launch, and if it comes on to blow heavily be careful to heave-to in good time. Now, if you will see to the arming of the men and to the provisioning of the launch, I will go below and get ready."

CHAPTER XVII

BY THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH

ANOTHER five minutes saw the whole party of us in the steam launch and under way for the—to us—invisible schooner in the north-western quarter. The bearing of the craft had been accurately taken, from aloft, the last thing before shoving off from the yacht, and as we had a boat-compass in the launch there was no possibility of our going wrong. The only thing that we had to fear was the springing up of a breeze before we reached the chase, thus prolonging the pursuit, or, still worse, the outburst of the threatened storm before the full accomplishment of our hazardous task. To tell the truth, I was even more anxious on account of the first than of the second contingency. The look of the weather was such as to lead me to the belief that the hurricane would not burst upon us in a squall of more or less violence, although of course it *might*; but I was quite expecting that it would be ushered in by the upspringing of a breeze, light and fitful at first, but rapidly increasing in heavy gusts, to be quickly followed by the outburst of

the hurricane itself; and it was the occurrence of these puffs and gusts that I dreaded, prolonging the pursuit by carrying the chase away from us until perhaps we should find it as impossible to get on board her as it would be to return to our own vessel.

However, there was no sign of any such thing when we shoved off from the *Evangeline*, and, once away from that craft, all that we could do was to push the launch along at her utmost speed, which, under a full head of steam, reached the very respectable figure of close upon thirteen knots.

As we rapidly increased our distance from the schooner, and her dimensions began to dwindle in comparison with the immensity of the wide-spreading plain of ink-like, sulkily-heaving water, upon the sluggish undulations of which she was heavily rolling, with her milk-white hull standing out in startling contrast to the background of dark and scowling sky, her toy-like smallness, and the dainty delicacy of her shape, combined with the taunt slenderness of her naked spars and the filmy, web-like fineness of her rigging, put a sterner and more sinister aspect into the weather portents, until one felt tempted to marvel at the temerity of man in daring to brave, in so small and delicate-looking a fabric, the most relentless fury of wind and sea. Truly, it was a wonderful picture to look at—wonderful, I mean, in its suggestiveness of brooding anger and impending strife, of possibilities of blind, savage, elemental fury, and per-

chance a desperate, all but hopeless struggle for continued existence on the part of that small delicate white shape down yonder, gleaming ghostly in the gathering gloom. But it was essentially a picture for the brush rather than for the pen; there is nothing in mere language, however eloquent, to bring home to the mind a realising sense of the dark, portentous grandeur and sublimity of that scowling scene; unless the eye has actually gazed with awe-struck expectation upon such another, the imagination alone lacks the power to fill in the details of multitudinous forms and subtle variations of colour that go to complete it; and word-painting alone—the mere description, however laboured and minute, of sky and sea and ship—is equally inefficacious. No; an eloquent writer may contrive to picture to the minds of his readers some faint idea of the glories of a sunset or the tranquil beauty of moonlight, but the gloomy majesty of such an impending storm as that of which I am now writing is not to be adequately conveyed in mere words.

Fortunately for our impatience, the man who had been stoking the launch throughout the morning watch had taken it into his head to clear the fire just before Purkiss had hailed the little craft to come alongside; we therefore had an abundance of steam, and the boat swept along, beam-on to the gathering swell, at top speed. She rolled to it like a gallied whale, but went along as dry as a bone, and the men seized the opportunity to snatch a

hearty breakfast while they might; as for me, I was altogether too anxious to think of eating or drinking, for I could not shut my eyes to the awful risk of our adventure. Indeed, it was one of those affairs that a man is—perhaps once or twice in the course of his life—irresistibly impelled to undertake, with his eyes wide open to all its possibilities of disaster, and which he therefore dares not think about until after it is all over; I was therefore heartily glad when, having run our own schooner hull-down, we quite suddenly made out the upper spars of the—supposed—*Olga* straight ahead, for it provided a new subject for our thoughts to work upon. And now, all in a moment, the old tormenting question again suggested itself to me, Suppose that, after all, the craft ahead should *not* be the *Olga*? Or, assuming her to be that vessel, what if I should find that Eva was not, after all, on board her? I scarcely knew which idea was the more distracting of the two; either of them was sufficient without the other to throw me into a very torment of anxiety, but the two together plunged me into a fever of impatience that threatened soon to become unendurable. The fact is that my anxiety and impatience, from the very commencement of the voyage, to overtake the *Olga*, with a subtle undercurrent of doubt throughout as to whether, when overtaken, I should actually find my lost love on board her, had been, all unsuspected by me, playing the very mischief with my nerves, so that now, when the vital question seemed at last about to be answered, Yea or Nay, it became

intolerable to suppose the possibility of a still further prolonged state of suspense.

As regarded the identity of the stranger ahead with the *Olga*, however, my suspense was not doomed to last very long. The sky grew by subtle mutations ever more threatening in its aspect, and the swell had perceptibly gathered weight since we left the *Evangeline*, yet the scurrying puffs that I dreaded as the precursors of the hurricane still held aloof, and left the schooner ahead motionless, permitting us to rapidly close with her; and some time before we raised her hull—by the time, indeed, that we had hove her close-reefed topsail clear of the sinuous horizon-line ahead—all doubt as to her being in very truth the *Olga* had left me; the spars that swung pendulum-like against the murk ahead were those of a schooner yacht of about our own size, and there was, moreover, a familiar look about them that carried the conviction home to me that my quest for the *Olga* was almost at an end.

As we closed with the craft, and it became evident that her crew had completed their preparations for the coming gale, my unquestionably rash resolution to board the vessel received some sort of justification—at least in my own eyes; for the Russians had contented themselves with close-reefing their topsail, mainsail, and boom-foresail, and stowing everything else but the fore-staysail, leaving the schooner under a spread of canvas that, while snug enough, perhaps, to show to an ordinary

gale, was in my opinion far too much to expose to such an outfly as I anticipated, and I determined that before leaving the vessel I would give the comtesse a hint that it would be well for her to insist upon a still further reduction of canvas.

When we were within about a mile of the yacht—now determinable as the *Olga*, beyond all question — they hoisted the Russian ensign at her gaff-end; and presently, as we shifted our helm a trifle in order to sheer alongside her at her starboard or lee gangway,—she having slued round with her head to the southward and eastward,—it became apparent that nearly or quite her whole crew were on deck, and from the manner in which they ranged themselves along the ship's rail, and the fact that several of the men had armed themselves with capstan bars, it looked very much as though they intended to offer some resistance to us should we attempt to board. In order, therefore, that there might be no misunderstanding or excuse for violence on their part, I caused our ensign staff to be stepped and the boat's ensign to be hoisted, and in this fashion we headed the launch for a dash alongside.

We were within about fifty fathoms of the yacht's starboard bow when a man was seen to emerge from the companion with a musket or rifle in his hand, which he waved above his head furiously as he rushed forward into the eyes of the vessel, shouting meanwhile to us in broken English to keep off, or he would fire into us; and then,

without waiting a moment to see whether or not we accepted his warning, he levelled the piece at the launch and fired. Simultaneously with the flash of the weapon I felt a blow and a sharp, stinging sensation in my left shoulder, just clear of the joint, and knew that I had been hit; and at the same instant a low, moaning sound swept through the air, followed by a smart puff of scorching hot wind that came and was gone again in a breath.

"By Heaven, men!" cried I, "we have not a second to lose; that is the first puff of the gale, and there are others not far behind, take my word for it! We have no time to waste with these fellows. Draw your cutlasses and revolvers, *and use them if any resistance is offered*; but use them with some discretion—do not kill anybody if you can help it. Now stand by to jump for her rail as we sheer alongside. Stop her! Starboard your helm a trifle. S—o! steady! Full speed astern! Stop her! Hook on, fore and aft! *Now* is our chance—*jump!*"

The launch surged up alongside in a splutter of foam from her propellers, the bowman and coxswain hooked on to the yacht's main and fore channels with their boat-hooks, and as the vessel rolled to her covering-board toward us, the ten armed men I had brought with me sprang to their feet, and we all made a simultaneous dash for the rail, grabbing it handsomely, and tumbling in over it upon the deck with the lightning rapidity of trained acrobats, to the blank astonishment of the Russian crew who gave back in dismay before us. The man with the

musket, however, was not prepared to let us have matters all our own way, and he came storming aft, brandishing his clubbed weapon, and crying out excitedly to his crew so vehemently that the fellows rallied, made a stand, and raised their handspikes preparatory to a rush upon us. At this moment another heavy, moaning gust of wind came sweeping down upon us, striking the yacht fair abeam and bowing her down to her covering-board. It was clear enough now that the gale might burst upon us at any moment; there was no time for argument or explanations, so as I saw that the man with the musket meant mischief,—indeed, he was coming at me with his clubbed weapon upraised for a stroke that might perhaps brain me if it fell,—I levelled a pistol full at him, pulled the trigger, and he dropped, face downward, upon the deck at my feet.

"One hand to the wheel," I shouted, "and head the yacht south-east-half-east,"—for the vessel was gathering steerage-way under the influence of the gust that was sweeping over her,—"the rest of you follow me, and drive these fellows below. Hurrah, lads! let them have it!" And, with a cheer, the *Evangelines* raised their cutlasses and made a rush at the Russians. The latter, however, proved to have no heart for fighting; perhaps the fall of their captain—for such was evidently the man I had shot—quelled them; but however that may be, they no sooner saw that we were in desperate earnest than they flung down such weapons as they held in their hands, and,

with a yell of genuine terror, made a clean bolt of it for the fore-scuttle, down which they tumbled in a heap, helter-skelter, each man's only anxiety being, apparently, to gain the shelter of the forecastle in advance of the rest of his fellows.

The whole thing was done and over in a few breathless seconds, and the yacht was practically ours, to do as we would with her; but, brief as was the time, the gust that had struck the vessel was past, and she was once more lying becalmed and without steerage-way. But I noticed that the swell had perceptibly gained in weight and speed within the last few minutes, and, anxious now only to get away from the Russian yacht with the utmost possible despatch, I placed Sennitt, the *Evangeline's* boatswain,—who was one of our party,—in temporary charge of the *Olga* while I went below, instructing him to station a couple of men at the fore-scuttle, with orders to allow no one to come on deck, and further, to take advantage of any other puffs that might come along to push the yacht to the southward and eastward, so as to shorten the distance between the two schooners as much as possible.

This matter arranged, I wended my way aft, and, entering the companion, descended to the saloon. I had only just time to notice that the apartment I had entered was furnished with an almost barbaric splendour of choice pictures, painted and gilded ceiling, stained glass sky-lights, elaborately ornamented silver lamps, costly wood-carvings, chairs, tables, and sofas more suited to the

boudoir of an empress than the saloon of a yacht, with a superb piano, dainty silken hangings, rich carpets, and the like, when a heavily embroidered silk curtain was drawn aside from a doorway at the after end of the saloon, and the comtesse herself stood before me, attired in a most ravishing demi-toilette, with her beautiful golden hair streaming in ringlets to below her waist, and her very fine deep blue eyes wide open in a most bewitching expression of childlike surprise and dismay. For just a moment she stood motionless, with the silk curtain as an exceedingly effective background for her rather *petite* figure, with her little daintily modelled hands tightly clasped together upon her breast, and her beautiful arms piquantly displayed by the loose sleeves of her robe, and then, with a little cry of delighted surprise, she darted toward me with both hands extended, exclaiming—

"Why, Dick—Mr. Berrington!—is it possible? Well, of all the delightful surprises! You bad, *wicked* boy! how dare you terrify us so? Why, only fancy, Captain Solevitch was here a minute ago to warn us that we were about to be attacked by *pirates*! And surely I heard the sounds of shots and a struggle on deck! And, in my terror and distraction, I was about to rush upstairs and see what it was all about. You have frightened me dreadfully, you— Why, you are *bleeding*!" She ended her pretty wheedling speech with a scream of unfeigned horror as she pointed to my left hand, in which I held my cap, and down which the blood was trickling from my wounded

shoulder—as I now found by looking at it—until it had become deeply reddened by the ensanguined stream.

The comtesse's scream was still ringing in the cabin when another curtain was hastily dashed aside, and Eva, —my own sweet love,—with, as it seemed to me, a single bound, was in my arms, with her own flung about my neck, and her beautiful head nestling lovingly upon my breast.

"Oh, Dick, my darling, my darling! You have come to me at last!" she murmured, as she nestled more closely to me, and her arms tightened their clasp about my neck.

"Yes, sweetheart," I returned, "at last—after a long, weary, anxious chase half round the world! But, pet," I continued, "glad as I am to see you, we must not dally here. We have not an instant to lose; the gale may burst upon us at any moment, and we have fifteen long miles to travel in the launch; you must therefore come with me at once, *this instant, without another moment's delay.*"

At this moment Sennitt poked his head down through the open skylight and shouted unceremoniously—

"Better be off, sir; the breeze seems to be comin' in airnest now, sir."

"Ay, ay, Sennitt," I replied; "we are coming. Get the hands into the launch at once."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the man, as his head disappeared; and the next moment I heard him shouting to our lads to tumble into the launch.

"Mr. Berrington," said the comtesse, "am I to under-

stand that you intend taking Miss Hepburn away from this yacht, and out of my protection?"

"Yes, comtesse," said I, "you may. I know nothing precise with regard to the circumstances under which she became your guest on board this yacht; but I know enough to understand clearly that she is not here of her own free will, and I am therefore about to take it upon myself to remove her, and further, I am fully prepared to answer for the act whenever called upon to do so. There is no time for any explanation at present, and therefore I must ask you to accept, for the moment, matters as they are. And just one word of advice before I leave you, madame: it is, in my opinion, about to blow heavily; I would therefore recommend you to insist upon your people putting the *Olga* under the shortest storm canvas they can show to it. I have the honour to bid you good-morning. Come, Eva!"

"Launch is all ready, sir, and the wind's freshenin' fast!" here bawled Sennitt down through the companion.

"Ay, ay, Sennitt. Coming!" I replied; and, bowing low to the comtesse, who had not a word to say, I took my sweetheart by the hand and conducted her up the companion ladder to the deck.

I was astonished, disconcerted, almost appalled, to see how great a change had been wrought in the aspect of the weather during the few minutes that I had spent in the *Olga's* saloon. It had grown literally almost as black as midnight down in the north-eastern quarter; but the

shapeless pall that had hitherto overspread the heavens was now broken up into dense masses of packed and writhing cloud-forms, the edges of which were tinged with lurid light, as though they were illuminated by the fierce ruddy glow of the flames of a gigantic conflagration. Under this awful light the water, now ruffled spitefully by a fast-freshening breeze from the north-east, ran black as ink, with the crests of the gathering surges gleaming here and there into pallid froth; and the atmosphere was vibrant with the low, weird moaning of the coming gale, intermingled with the shriller wailing of the gusts that were already sweeping athwart the face of the deep. I glanced hurriedly round, and noted that Sennitt had got the Russian crew on deck again, with a hand at the wheel, and that the yacht was still heading to the southward and eastward and going fast through the water, and I also saw that he had got the gangway unshipped and the launch, plunging wildly, hauled up to it; I therefore hurried Eva to the ship's side, and, watching for a favourable opportunity, soon had the satisfaction of seeing her safely deposited in the stern-sheets, into which I instantly followed her.

"Shove off! full speed ahead!" was now the word; and, steering the launch off from the Russian schooner's side, away we went, drawing rapidly ahead of the vessel as our small steamer gathered way. We were no sooner fairly ahead of the *Olga* and clear of her lee than we had an earnest of what was in store for us in the shape of a

sea that slapped up against the boat's broadside and sent a heavy shower of spray flying over us. Fortunately, Eva was sitting to leeward of me, and she escaped with but a slight sprinkling ; but, to save her as much as possible from the discomfort of a wetting, I at once wrapped her in a mackintosh I had had the forethought to bring with me in the boat.

"Has anybody seen anything of the yacht?" I asked, as I settled back into my seat after performing this little service for my sweetheart.

"Yes, sir," answered Sennitt, who was just behind me, steering the boat. "She's straight ahead of us, and was coming along this way under a whole mainsail when we seen her last. There she is, sir," as we rose upon the ridge of a sea ; "you can see her plain enough now, sir."

Yes, there she was, sure enough, under a whole mainsail and a balloon foresail, coming along like a racehorse, apparently, by the way that she was laying over to it, although she was still about eight miles distant, and therefore hull-down as yet. It was by this time blowing a decidedly strong breeze, and Purkiss was evidently driving the vessel like a madman, but none too hard ; for by the rapidity with which the wind was freshening, and the spite with which it already swooped down upon us, it was only too clear that it was to be "touch and go" with us; and as I looked up at the summits of the fast-gathering seas that with pallid crests of hissing foam came roaring down toward us, I almost began to despair of getting

the launch hoisted up to her davits when we should reach the side of the yacht.

We had closed our own vessel to within about three miles when there came a sudden lull in the wind, and, looking away to windward, we saw that the atmosphere had thickened that way until it had circumscribed the horizon to within a mile of us, while at the base of the thickness was a rapidly advancing line of whiteness. Was it wind, or rain? "Pray God, the latter!" I fervently ejaculated, as I put the question to myself. It looked like rain; and rain it *was*, for presently we heard the hissing roar of it, and in another minute it swept down upon us in a perfect *wall* of water, a blinding deluge of so dense a volume that it enveloped us in a darkness almost like that of night. It was as if the bottom of a cloud had dropped out and had let the whole body of water that it contained down upon us with a splash! The bursting of a waterspout could scarcely have been worse, I thought; and when I looked forward toward the eyes of the boat at the men sitting there, it was like looking at objects when one is overboard and swimming under water. It continued like this for perhaps three minutes,—certainly not longer than four,—when it ceased as abruptly as it had begun, yet in that short space of time it had filled the launch half-way up to her thwarts.

When the rain cleared away, it was, if possible, blacker than ever to windward, and I noticed that the fiery reflection in the clouds had entirely disappeared. The wind had

dropped dead during the passage of that deluge of water, and the yacht now lay becalmed, some two and a half miles distant, her rain-darkened sails flapping idly from side to side with the furious roll of her upon the steep swell. The steam ejector was put on, and all hands also went to work baling with their sou'-westers, and in a few minutes the water was got rid of. Luckily for us all, the engines and boiler were enclosed in a separate watertight compartment, almost entirely decked over and with a good high coaming round it; but for the existence of this compartment our fire would assuredly have been extinguished by that foaming deluge of rain, and we should have been left to do what we could with the oars belonging to the boat. Despite our mackintoshes and oilskins, the downfall had left us all wet to the skin—as wet, indeed, as though we had been overboard; but the rain had not, after all, been an unmitigated evil, for it had beaten down the sea somewhat, and the launch now went along without any water breaking over her.

During all this time my sweetheart had sat nestling close to me, with her hand in mine, but without a word passing between us,—for, indeed, the aspect of our surroundings was such as to fill me with the keenest anxiety as to the issue of our adventure,—but now, in the lull that followed upon the heels of the rain squall, I turned to her and was about to speak, when there came a blinding flash of livid flame out of the heart of the stooping black cloud overhead that struck, hissing like a bolt of white-

hot iron, into the sea close alongside us, and simultaneously with it we were dazed and stunned by an ear-splitting, echoless crash of thunder, of so appalling an intensity of sound that it might almost have served to announce the demolition of a world. It smote the air a blow that caused a sensible concussion; the entire fabric of the launch quivered with it, and I saw the men involuntarily crouch and cower under it, with a lifting of their hands to their heads; while the sweet girl at my side uttered a low scream of terror, as she clung to me with both hands upon my arm.

The silence that followed upon this frightful explosion was almost as terrifying as the crash itself had been, so profound and intense was it; it was as though some catastrophe had just occurred of so appalling a character that all Nature stood breathless in awe-struck contemplation of it; and so portentous was its effect upon the nerves that the quick beat of the boat's engines and the soft seething of the foam past her sides smote upon the ear with a jarring sharpness that was absolutely painful. This dreadful, death-like silence prevailed for fully five minutes, and then a low, wailing moan came wafting to us athwart the rounded undulations of the swell, and passed away; the gloom deepened; the darkness and dead silence sank upon our hearts with the weight of a soul-curdling menace so overpowering that one of the men, glancing in terror at the sky, dashed his hand to his forehead and cried out, "O my God, what is going to

happen? Is the world coming to an end?" As the man spoke, another dreadful flash of keen blue lightning gashed its way through the pall of vapour overhead, instantly followed by an ear-splitting thunder-crash, and as the sound died away we became aware that the air was again full of moans and wailings; a sharp gust of wind swept athwart us, and then down came a furious scuffle upon us that seemed to be blowing from all quarters at once, scooping up the water from the round backs of the swell and filling the air with a lashing of salt rain for perhaps half a minute, when it settled into a smart breeze from the north-east, that increased in strength with such amazing rapidity that in less than five minutes it was blowing a strong gale.

We had by this time closed the yacht to within half a mile, and were able to see that Purkiss had dowsed the yards and both topmasts, as well as rigged in his jib-boom, and was now busy getting in his mainsail and big foresail —which he had hung on to until the very last moment, in the hope of getting to us before the outburst of the gale. The craft was now under nothing but a storm fore-trysail, and even this seemed almost more than she could bear, so savagely was the wind breezing up; and, sure enough, we presently saw that they had started the throat and peak halliards, with the evident intention of reefing the sail. As for us, the sea was rising like magic, and breaking over the boat's weather side in such deluges that it presently became necessary to turn her stem-on to the

sea and go ahead dead slow to prevent the drowning out of the fire; and, even thus, it began to look very doubtful whether we could keep the craft above water until the yacht reached us—for we were now obliged to abandon the idea of *reaching her*. Indeed, our situation had in a very few minutes grown truly alarming; for although the launch was constructed in compartments, and was further protected by a short deck forward and aft, besides being provided with air-chambers of sufficient capacity to render her unsinkable, the water had risen—and was still continuing to rise—with such astounding rapidity that in a few minutes it had grown heavy enough to break over the boat in a perfect deluge every time that she met the crest of a sea, with the result that she was gradually filling forward, or in her largest compartment, despite the utmost efforts of the men to keep her free by baling. Nor was this all: her wild plunges were causing the water in the fore compartment to surge fore and aft so violently that, despite all we could do to prevent it, it was constantly breaking over the bulkhead into the stoke-hole, and imperilling our fire. Should that happen to be extinguished, it would assuredly be all over with us at once, for we should immediately lose command of the boat,—oars would be absolutely of no use in that wild sea,—and she would at once fill, and only too probably roll over and over with us. Purkiss, however, clearly saw our predicament; for presently, having close-reefed his trysail, he came edging along toward us, carefully manœuvring

the schooner so as to come up close to windward of us, within the reaching distance of a heaving-line.

The yacht was still a good cable's length distant from us when, with a wild and deafening yell, the hurricane suddenly burst upon us with a demoniac fury that utterly baffles description, and through the pelting and blinding smother of spindrift and scudwater that the gale brought with it, we dimly saw the schooner's masts stooping beneath the stroke of the wind lower and lower, until two or three of the men cried out that she was capsizing; and, indeed, had I not known, from the manner in which the vessel's ballast was stowed and secured, that such an accident was practically impossible, I should have thought so too, by the look of her.

But our attention was instantly drawn away from the schooner to our own desperate situation. For now we had not only the steep, quickly-running sea to contend with, but the air was full of *sheets* of water that, torn from the heads of the seas as they reared themselves above the launch, were dashed violently into her in such overwhelming volumes that it at once became apparent that she could not possibly remain above water more than a few minutes longer. Where was the yacht? Was there any hope of our being able to reach her? I peered anxiously through the thickness, and saw her lowermast-heads and the head of her trysail at no great distance away on our starboard bow, and it was clear that she was looking well up; evidently they had been compelled to put their helm



EVA.

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down and bring the vessel to the wind. She was slowly fore-reaching in such a direction that she would presently cross our bows, and I saw that it was beyond their power to help us,—perhaps, having lost sight of us, they believed the launch to be swamped and all hands of us drowned; whatever was to be done must be done by ourselves; and, moreover, there was not a second to lose. We must go ahead, at all risks, and endeavour to close with the schooner.

"Knock off baling, lads," I shouted, "and range yourselves as closely together as possible against the stoke-hole bulkhead, so as to form a breakwater with your bodies to keep the water out for a few minutes, until we can get alongside the schooner. We must go ahead and close her at once, or she will ratch away from us. Pack yourselves as closely as you can; so—that ought to do some good! Now go ahead upon the engines as hard as you dare! Sennitt, can you see the schooner?"

"Yes, sir, I see her," was the reply; "she'll be dead to wind'ard of us in another minute."

"Well, keep the boat stem-on to the sea, and get alongside, if you can. If you miss her, you'll not get a second chance!"

"I'll try, sir," answered the man; and then we all held our breath, and I felt my sweet Eva's clutch tighten upon my arm as the boat, gathering way, drove her sharp stem right into the heart of a sea, and the green water came tumbling into her in a cataract that filled her fore com-

partment to above the thwarts, and came foaming aft until it struck the bulwark of men ranged right athwart the centre of the little craft, surging up as high as their breasts ere it fell back into the boat—although a considerable quantity of it flew over their heads into the sea astern. There was an ominous hissing in the stoke-hole as the water foamed up to the men's chests; but the man who was tending the fire cried out that it was all right,—there was no harm done; and the next moment the boat took another plunge that happily sent a considerable quantity of water out of her again. It was a desperate struggle for life, that of the next sixty seconds; and when it ended, the launch was full to her gunwale forward, and all but unmanageable. But they saw us in time on board the yacht, and hove us a line with the end of a small hawser bent on to it, by means of which we were able to haul up to the vessel's side, when they gave us the end of the mainsheet aft, and we brought the boat alongside and held her there long enough to enable all hands to scramble out. But to save the boat herself was a sheer impossibility; we could never have hoisted her in, full as she was of water; we therefore had to let her go, and the very first sea that met her as she drifted clear of the schooner rolled her bottom-up. Two minutes later, she vanished amid the smother on the yacht's weather quarter, and that was the last we ever saw of the gallant little boat that had served us so well.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FOUNDERING OF THE *OLGA*

MY first business, of course, was to convey my poor half-drowned sweetheart below, and turn her over to the care and ministrations of the maid whom I had luckily had the forethought to bring with me; having done which, I hastily "shifted" into the dry clothes that Mitchell—that most thoughtful of valets—had laid out for me, and then hurried on deck once more.

The whole business of seeing to Eva's immediate welfare and attending to my own comfort could not have detained me longer than a quarter of an hour below, at most; but even in that short period the weather had undergone a marked change for the worse, and when I regained the deck it was blowing a perfect hurricane from the north-east, with so furious a sea running that, steeply as the yacht was heeled by the tremendous power of the wind, and close as she lay to it under her reefed storm-trysail, the water was pouring incessantly over her weather bow in such overwhelming volume that it had become necessary to batten down the fore-scuttle and to bring

the watch aft to the quarter-deck, where I found them crouching for shelter under the weather bulwarks. It was well for us all, perhaps, that the vessel was heeled so steeply as she was; for in this posture of her most of the water that would otherwise have come on board—and possibly swept away our skylights and other deck fittings —now flew clear over her into the sea to leeward, while much of what came aboard surged out again over the rail at her next lee roll. The sky, meanwhile, had changed its hue from a deep, livid, slatey grey to a dingy black, across which flew an endless procession of tattered cloud streamers of somewhat lighter hue, the headlong speed of which athwart our slanting masts fearfully emphasised the demoniac screaming and yelling of the wind in our rigging. The spindrift and scudwater filled the air with a rushing torrent of salt rain that scourged the skin like the lashing of a whip, and occasionally whole sheets of water torn from an adjacent wave-crest would crash against the yacht's upturned weather side with the sound of a broadside of grape striking her, and go driving away to leeward in a thick cloud like smoke.

And where, meanwhile, was the *Olga*, and how was she faring in this mad turmoil of wind and sea? That was the first question that I put to Purkiss upon my return to the deck, but neither he nor anybody else could give me any information respecting her; when last seen, she was about two and a half miles distant in the north-western board, but had been lost sight of immedi-

ately upon the outburst of the hurricane, everybody being too fully occupied in looking out for the steam launch and taking care of our own vessel to give a thought to anything else. Purkiss, however, was of opinion that she could not be very far away, and having clawed his way to the weather main rigging and taken a long searching look ahead and to windward without discovering anything, had just rejoined me near the companion, and was indulging in some rather uncomplimentary remarks upon the seamanship of the Russian yachtsmen, when one of our lads, who was huddled up under the shelter of the weather bulwarks, cried out some words that we did not catch, pointing at the same time with outstretched arm to something away down upon our lee bow.

This at once set us all peering in the same direction; and presently, in the heart of the thickness, a small object enveloped in a very smother of spray loomed indistinctly into view as the yacht soared upward upon the breast of an oncoming sea. What it was we could none of us clearly make out, for it vanished into the trough almost upon the instant that it was seen; but when the next sea lifted us we caught sight of it again, and this time we were enabled to identify it as neither more nor less than the *Olga*, completely dismasted; she was lying broadside-on to the sea, which was making a clean breach over her, and her situation appeared to be in the last degree critical.

"Now, there," observed Purkiss, "is an example of

what I was just sayin', Mr. Berrington. First of all, these here Rooshians goes and leaves their wessel under canvas that a thousand-ton ship couldn't show to such a hullabaloo as this here, and the consekense is that they loses their sticks. Then, that not bein' enough for 'em—O my God A'mighty, just look at her, sir! Why, she'll *founder*, if they don't look alive and do something! Why don't they rig a sea anchor and launch it overboard to bring the craft head-on to the sea? There again! Why, Mr. Berrington, sir, she *can't* live long through such weather as she's makin' of it!"

The poor little craft was indeed making perfectly awful weather of it. Being under sail, we were drifting much faster than the Russian yacht, and were setting rapidly down toward her, while ratching along sufficiently to carry us to windward of her at a distance of about a cable's length; consequently we were getting a clearer view of her every minute, and with every heave of her into sight from behind the intervening wave-ridges we were enabled to form a truer estimate of her peril. She was rolling like a log, with a deadly sluggishness of movement that, coupled with her depth in the water, gave her the appearance of being already half-full, which, indeed, she might very well be, for the seas that met her seemed to brim in over her weather-rail and sweep her from stem to stern in one wild smother of foam.

I staggered to the companion, and made a dive below

for my binoculars; and when I came on deck again there was Purkiss, squatted flat upon the planks, close up under the weather bulwarks, working away at the wreck with the ship's glass. She had by this time drawn aft nearly to abeam of us, and was not more than a bare cable's length distant; consequently we were enabled to see her clearly whenever we were both hove up to the top of a sea at the same instant.

"Well, Purkiss, what do you make of her?" I asked, as I seated myself beside him on the deck and brought my glasses to bear.

"Why, sir, I look upon her as bein' as good as a lost ship," was the reply. "She must have took in a deal of water, by the look of her; and— Phew! my eye! did ye see that, sir?"—as a perfect mountain of a sea swept over her. "Why, that's stripped her of her weather bulwarks from the fore riggin' to the taff'l, and it must ha' washed some of her people overboard, too, for there don't seem to be nearly so many of 'em as there was about her decks a minute ago. And, if I don't mistake, sir, that main skylight of hers is stove in; and if so— *Now*, what are they up to? Why, they're wavin' to *us*! But, my poor dear fellers, we can't do nothing for yer;" and the old chap scrambled to his feet with a keen, eager look round at the weather and the sea.

"No, no," he muttered; "we daren't do it—we daren't *try* it, even. Mr. Berrington, sir, we *can't* do anything to help 'em. There they are, down to leeward of us,

and if we was to put up our helm for a single minute to run down to 'em, the sea 'd sweep our decks from end to end, and make just such a wreck of us as she is. Is there *anything* ye can think of, sir, that we could do as 'd be of any good to 'em? *I* can't think of anything!"

Nor could I. The fact was as Purkiss had stated: we were to windward of them, and could do nothing to get any nearer to them; we could neither run down to them, nor could we get the ship round to ratch to and fro, and thus drive down to them. In fact, we were as helpless to rescue the poor wretches as though we had been a hundred miles distant from them. And, indeed, helpless as we were, it would have been infinitely better, both for them and for us, had we been out of sight, for our close proximity could only buoy the Russian crew with false hopes, while we had the misery of seeing them slowly perishing before our eyes. For perishing they were, beyond all question. Those frightful breaches of the sea over the unfortunate *Olga's* hull had practically destroyed her deck fittings, and every sea that broke on board her was evidently pouring tons of water down into her interior, for as it passed away it left her floating visibly deeper and with a more horribly sickly lurching movement in her rolls and plunges. Yet her crew appeared to be doing absolutely nothing to preserve their ship; they had not manned the pumps, or attempted—as Purkiss had remarked—

to rig a sea anchor; they had not even thought, apparently, of letting go one of the yacht's ordinary mooring anchors—which, although it would not, of course, have reached bottom, would, with a good scope of cable,—or, better still, a grass hawser,—have brought her head to wind and sea, and have enabled her to make better weather of it. But no; they seemed to be looking to us to help them under conditions of weather that rendered any assistance an utter impossibility.

A few minutes sufficed to settle her away a couple of points abaft our lee beam, while we had drifted down to within about seventy fathoms of her, when — having my binoculars bearing upon her at the moment—I saw a female figure, whom I at once recognised as that of the comtesse, emerge from the companion and rush to the weather side of the deck, stretching her arms toward us in an imploring manner, while her long golden tresses streamed like a meteor upon the gale. The wreck was at that instant settling into the trough of the sea, and when we next saw her, a few seconds later, the comber was boiling over her in a smother of froth that left nothing of her visible but just her bows and her bowsprit, with the stump of the jib-boom sticking out through the cap. As the smother swept away, the hull struggled languidly to the surface once more, but her covering-board looked to be not more than six inches above the surface of the water, *and her decks were bare*; every soul of those who stood there a minute before had been

swept overboard! As we looked at the poor struggling hull, now in her death-throes, we saw her quarter sink lower in the brine, while her handsome bows upreared themselves until the copper on her keen cutwater once more showed above the surface in a wet, ruddy gleam against the leaden grey of the sea; her stern sank until her quarter-piece was flush with the water, and then another heavy sea went boiling and surging over her deck. There was another wild smother of foam as the water swirled among the splintered stanchions, the companion, the shattered skylights, the short stumps of her masts, her windlass, and such of her other deck fittings as had not been swept away; and, as it passed, we beheld the bows of the vessel above water, with her bowsprit almost perpendicular in the air, just sliding out of sight. Another second, and they, too, had vanished, leaving not a vestige of wreckage to show where a noble and costly pleasure vessel, with all her company, had gone to their doom. As the raging waters closed over the spot where the gallant little ship had floated a minute before, a shivering as of an ague seized me; for all in a moment the thought flashed to my memory that my own sweet love was, only a few hours earlier, a tenant of that same ill-fated schooner, and but for the good fortune that had enabled us to overtake the craft in the very nick of time—and not one single second too soon—my darling, too, would have been sleeping her last sleep far down in the deep darkness beneath the

wild turmoil and upon the green ooze where now rested the cruel, heartless woman who, for her own selfish ends, would relentlessly have doomed another to the fate that had overtaken herself.

The thought made me anxious to ascertain how my sweetheart was faring after her terrible experience in the launch; and I thereupon descended to the saloon in time to meet the dear girl at the door of her own berth, from which she was emerging, radiant as a summer morning, and lovely as Aphrodite herself, in the joy of her escape from the comtesse and her reunion with me.

We, of course, had a thousand questions to ask each other; and I then learned that Mapleson's clever astuteness had enabled him to construct with the most consummate accuracy the whole story of my darling's abduction out of the very slender clues with which I had been enabled to furnish him, coupled with those that he had ferreted out for himself; every one of his theories proving to have been absolutely correct. It was, of course, a cruel shock to my poor girl to learn that her uncle had connived at her "removal" for the sake of securing her property; and yet, after a while, I found that she was by no means so profoundly astonished as I had expected her to be; for she now admitted that, attentive and devoted as her uncle had always been to her, she had never been able to satisfy herself thoroughly that he really loved her, while —now that her eyes were opened to his true character—

she was able to recall circumstances that, at the moment of their occurrence, had led her to ask herself, with keen and bitter self-reproach, whether he did not indeed actually hate her. The comtesse's explanation to Eva of her conduct in the matter of the abduction was to the effect that Colonel Hepburn had, only a few days prior to the act, been made aware that certain very grave charges had been brought against me by persons in whose truth and uprightness he had the most profound faith, and that, in order that he might have time to sift these charges thoroughly, and ascertain for himself their truth or falsehood, while at the same time avoiding the scandalous rumours that he believed would be at once set afloat by a postponement of his niece's marriage, he had appealed to the comtesse for help, and, hearing of her projected trip round the world, had besought her to carry his niece away with her at all hazards, rather than that she should be allowed to marry a man whom he had too much reason to fear would prove to be an utter scamp. The excuse, of course, proved to be altogether too crude and shallow and flimsy to deceive for a moment so clear-headed a girl as Eva, and she simply refused to accept it; whereupon, it appeared, the comtesse had shrugged her lovely shoulders, and, with an air of contemptuous indifference, had said it was the only explanation that she had to give, and that Eva was at perfect liberty to accept or reject it as she pleased. My poor darling's life on board the *Olga* had been anything but a pleasant one,

as might be supposed; for the comtesse, although not absolutely unkind, had never shown Eva the least consideration from the moment of her finding herself on board the yacht, leaving her to discover or invent what amusement or recreation she could for herself, and behaving in all respects precisely as though the poor girl had not been there. Indeed, her lot would have been almost unendurable but for the quiet, unostentatious attention and sympathy that madame's English maid had shown her, whereby she had been enabled to obtain many little comforts that she must otherwise have gone without. Speaking of this maid, Eva suddenly broke off to say—

"Oh, Dick, did you pick up any of the bottles that I threw overboard?"

"Bottles?" I ejaculated. "What bottles do you refer to, sweet?"

"Then you did not pick up any of them?" she answered rather irrelevantly. "Well, I must tell you about them. Of course we all saw the *Evangeline* flying after us that last night in the Straits of Magellan, and although the comtesse insisted that Captain Solevitch should spread all the sail he could, in order that we might not be overtaken and possibly communicated with, I am confident that nobody but myself associated the strange vessel in any way with *you*. I did, though; for, like everybody else, I had been watching your beautiful white yacht almost continuously from the moment that she

first appeared in sight, and as she drew nearer and nearer the conviction forced itself upon me with ever increasing strength that she was in some inscrutable way familiar to me. I puzzled myself a good deal over this strange feeling, until at last it dawned upon my mind that the vessel we were all looking at and admiring so much exactly resembled the photographs of the yacht that my dear, kind, foolish boy had caused to be built for us to spend our honeymoon in, and then I felt certain that, having in some inexplicable fashion found out what had become of me, you had started in pursuit with the determination to deliver me from my cruel captivity; and from that moment my spirits rose to such an extent that the comtesse frankly expressed her astonishment at the change in me, and was always worrying me to tell her what was the cause of it. Of course I did not tell her,—I did not even attempt to offer her a plausible explanation,—but allowed her to puzzle and worry herself as much as she pleased with conjecture; and meanwhile tried to devise some means of making you acquainted with my whereabouts, especially after the dreadful accident that interrupted your pursuit — which was, of course, a terrible disappointment to me. At last I remembered having heard or read somewhere that sailors who wish to communicate any very particular intelligence sometimes write it on a piece of paper which they put in a bottle and then seal up and throw overboard, in the hope that it will be picked up by another ship; so I

determined to do the same, feeling sure that if you saw a sealed bottle floating past you would stop and pick it up. It took me some time to decide what I would write upon the paper every day; but at length, after thinking the matter over, I came to the conclusion that the most useful information I could afford you would be the situation of the yacht on each day, and the direction in which we were sailing, leaving it to your ingenuity to trace us from that. The next thing, of course, was to procure this information without exciting anyone's suspicions; and this I was at length able to do through Crosby, the comtesse's English maid, who speaks Russian, and who undertook to obtain the information from Captain Solevitch by taking advantage of the man's ardent admiration of her. So every afternoon this good girl Crosby brought me the yacht's latitude and longitude at noon and the course she was then steering, and this information I would then write distinctly on a piece of paper, signing my name underneath, and then carefully seal it up in a dry bottle, — which also Crosby contrived to procure for me, — dropping it overboard through my port as soon as possible after dark, when no one would be likely to notice the act. And to think that, after all, you never found any of them!—it is really too bad!"

"Never mind, sweet," I replied; "I found *you*, which is all that was required. At the same time, let me tell you that it was a very clever idea of yours to throw those

bottles overboard; and the information that you enclosed in them was precisely what would have been most useful to me had we chanced to find two or three of them, for it would have enabled me to lay down the *Olga's* position upon the chart for the days to which the information might happen to have referred, and would have given me a more or less definite idea of the point toward which the comtesse was aiming. A bottle, of course, is a very small object to attract notice in anything but a very calm sea, and we might have passed yours within a few fathoms and yet not have observed them; or we might have passed them during the night; or we might have passed them at a distance of many miles. Sailors do not, as a rule, give as much attention as perhaps they ought to floating bottles; still, had we passed one that was sealed conspicuously enough to have attracted the men's attention, I have no doubt they would have reported the fact, and under the circumstances I should certainly have endeavoured to pick it up and ascertain its contents."

Well, I need not inflict any more of our conversation upon the reader; it was, of course, intensely interesting to the conversationalists, but it would be so to nobody else; I will therefore pass on to the conclusion of my story, which may be told in a very few words, since it pretends to be nothing more than the plain, simple narrative of a voyage undertaken under somewhat unusual conditions. The hurricane blew with extraordinary fury for ten hours,

and then gradually softened down, until by sunrise next day it had blown itself completely out, and when at eight o'clock I went on deck I found a cloudless and brilliant sky overhead, and the ship, under every thread that Purkiss could pack upon her, bowling along at about eight knots over a long and somewhat heavy swell, with a soft and pleasant breeze, sweet as new milk, over the port quarter. We were shaping a course for Tahiti, at which most lovely island we duly arrived after a rather long but exceedingly pleasant passage. We remained there three or four days, steeping our souls in the sensuous beauty of the place, and indulging in several delightful rides and drives about the island, and then weighed once more and made sail for Melbourne.

In due course the busy capital of Victoria, South Australia, was reached; and here Eva at once found herself the centre of a large circle of old, staunch, well-tried friends, who were filled with astonishment and the most lively sympathy at as much of her story as she chose to tell. I had already been urgently pressing her to consent to our marriage upon our arrival in Australia, and now her numerous friends added their entreaties to mine, nothing short of such a festive celebration seeming to afford them a sufficient opportunity for the expression of their kindly sympathy and goodwill; and at length our united representations and entreaties prevailed, the darling consenting to throw herself away upon me as soon as that extraordinary necessity of civilisa-

tion, a "trousseau," could be provided. The construction and provision of the various indispensable items of this requisite to a properly arranged marriage seemed to me to occupy a most unconscionable length of time, although quite a small army of workpeople were engaged upon it; but at length the day arrived when no further excuses for delay were possible, and my lovely sweetheart became my wife in the most fashionable church at Melbourne. Needless to say that we were positively deluged with beautiful and costly wedding presents by our genial and lavishly open-handed Australian friends, whose hospitality was so hearty and irresistible that it occupied us a long month to even partially answer their kindly demands upon us; at the end of which time we sailed in a leisurely fashion for home, taking India, Ceylon, and the Cape of Good Hope on our way.

I need scarcely say that our first act on arriving at Melbourne was to communicate with Colonel Hepburn by telegraph, acquainting him, in a carefully-worded message, with the fact of Eva's safety, and the loss of the *Olga* with all hands; and the dear girl herself had long previously written a most voluminous letter to her uncle, —which was posted within an hour of our arrival,— the contents of which my darling kept most religiously locked within her own gentle breast, but the general import of which I subsequently gathered to be that, whatever the extent of the colonel's culpability in the matter of her abduction, she freely forgave him all, and

most earnestly desired that, upon our arrival home, he would meet us precisely as though the incident had never occurred. This letter, however, never reached the hand for which it was intended; for upon our arrival at Colombo I received an intimation from my solicitor that upon such and such a date Colonel Hepburn had been seized with an attack of paralysis which had terminated fatally. The date given indicated that the seizure must have occurred immediately upon the receipt of our telegram.

With the death of the colonel there passed away, of course, all opportunity for us ever to become acquainted with the details of the diabolical plot in which he had been a participator. And it was better so: it was enough, and more than enough, for us to know that such a plot had been actually devised, and acquiesced in by him, against the life of a gentle and innocent girl of his own kith and kin; no good could accrue from a specific knowledge of the precise means by which the dreadful end of the conspirators was to have been attained, and the absence of all definite information upon this head at least left our imaginations free to credit the guilty ones with a vague, indefinite mercifulness in the execution of their project which a fuller knowledge would only too probably have rendered wholly impossible. For my own part, now that the peril was past, my chief anxiety was to erase the whole affair as completely as might be from my own and my wife's memory; and while neither of us are

ever in the least likely to forget the stirring incidents of the adventure, I think we are both disposed to rest completely satisfied with the final result of a most memorable voyage, that proved indeed to be a stern chase and a long one.

THE END

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